Text: Luke 2:22-40

**Introduction**

I’m a terrible preacher for New Years. It is not that I don’t get the point. Looking back, taking stock and letting go. Looking forward, gathering strength and moving with hope. It is just that I tend to think of that process – and let’s put a name on it, that is repentance and sanctification – is a daily type thing. And if not daily, at least weekly. As Luther puts it in the Catechism. “the old Adam in us should daily be drowned and die…and the new man daily come forth and arise to live before God.”

If anyone is associated with the 12 steps, they spell the same thing out in deeper granularity. Especially if you get Bill’s original wordings. Steps 1 through 3 might not be a daily thing. But steps 4 through 7 are a daily thing. The 12 steps were developed for people addicted to a specific sin – alcoholism – but we are all sin addicts. And we probably all have our besetting ones. It is just that ours might not be as socially damaging as alcohol. Some might even be socially favored. So we get a pass. Step 10 was the reminder when things were going good and we might be tempted to think we’d beat it. “Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.” Step 11 and 12 are about sanctification. The reason we might even want to get rid of sin is so we might, “improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.” That’s the living before God part. Step 12 was then our duty to others who might still be living in a land of deep darkness.

**Text**

Our gospel lesson for today presents us with two characters – Simeon and Anna. Luke as a gospel writer likes to pair male and female characters. Zechariah and Mary both receive announcements from Gabriel. The centurion’s servant and the widow of Nain’s son. The mustard seed and the yeast, the lost sheep and the lost coin. There are a lot of male and female pairings in Luke and Acts – his second volume. And at first blush we might be tempted to read these as Luke filling a DEI quota. But the problem with that is that the pairings while similar, often have differences. And those differences are often more than window dressing.

With Simeon and Anna I want to call forth a couple of differences. The first one is one that I think we often just miss. We know that Anna is old. Our translation tells us she is 84 years old. And in how it words at least 60 of those years were probably as a widow. But it is possible that she’s even older. You could read that 84 years how long she was a widow, which would put her over 100. The old King James reflects the ambiguity. But take a second to look and tell me how old Simeon is…while you are looking, yes, I know in every picture ever drawn of Simeon he’s an old guy with a long white beard. Find anything yet? You won’t. There is no indication of Simeon’s age. We assume it from the parallel with Anna. And I think we typically assume it from the promise of the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before the Lord’s Christ. And we assume that he’s old. That like the promises of the Old Testament to say Sarah, the promise is getting long in the tooth.

That isn’t a bad reading, but for today, imagine heightening another contrast. A much younger Simeon, full of zeal, told by the Holy Spirit and brought by that Spirit to the temple to see the thing promised. And the man’s reaction to seeing the fulfillment of God’s promise is “let your servant go in peace.” Not an old man saying that, but a younger one. The young man is fine to go now, and what does the ancient Anna do? She “gives thanks to God and speaks of him to all who were waiting.” It’s a picture of the world turned upside down. The old full of vigor and the young having seen everything. This is what the advent of the messiah has brought.

There is one other distinction I want to highlight. What Simeon and Anna were waiting for. Simeon was “waiting for the consolation of Israel.” Anna was “waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.” Consolation and redemption are different things. Consolation is for the one who knows things aren’t right, and they can’t – at least not easily or here and now – be made right. The “righteous and devout” soul knowing that his own righteousness and piety isn’t enough. All the blood of beasts, whether rams or turtledoves, on those altars slain, could not give the conscience peace or wipe away the stain. What might calm, console, such a soul? It is only the vision of God and his righteousness. “My eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples.” The consolation of Israel is not just the consolation of the Jews – but all peoples. The revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel. Having heard the witness of the Holy Spirit and the seen the fulfillment had brought Simeon’s soul consolation.

Redemption, what Anna was waiting for, is something more personal I think. Consolation is knowing that the inequities of life will be made right. That in the fullness of time all will be well. Redemption is being freed from the pit. Redemption is feeling like you’ve wasted things. That you’ve been discarded or set aside. Maybe forgotten. Anna is waiting for that promised moment when those the world takes no notice of are redeemed by God as his special possession. Unlike Ruth no kinsman redeemer was found for Anna. Until she saw the Christ child. The redeemer of all Jerusalem. The redeemer of all who feel they are in the pit.

**Christological**

I said I was a terrible New Year’s preacher. Because I honestly don’t have that shiny happiness that people seem to want to feel on New Years. Champaign and crystal balls and kisses at midnight.

What I have first is a bit too pagan. The god Janus had two faces, one looking back. And looking back usually convinces me of the first step – I am powerless. I do the things I don’t want to do. Lots of things I intended to do, I just didn’t. And as I get older the time frame to do them slips away.

But repentance is always the first act of faith. And the second I admit my powerlessness, it becomes clear that there is a high power. That’s what Simeon and Anna saw. That’s what has been given to us in Mary’s child. That is what has been revealed to on the cross. That is the promise of the resurrection. In Christ might not be that shiny happiness that you can make last a night. In Christ is our hope.

In Christ we have our consolation. In the fullness of time all will be well. In Christ we have our redemption. We are no longer in pit. That loss we might feel of years gone by is met with the promise of eternal years. Right now – even in age – we are like children growing and becoming strong and filled with wisdom. That’s what this time is about. That we might come to know God and give our lives to him. That we can trust his grace. That we have hope. Because the favor of God is upon us.

We have seen his salvation, prepared in the presence of all peoples.

**Moral & Eschatological**

That go Janus also had that forward looking face. We have been called into the presence of God who has given us himself. Maybe we depart in peace tonight, maybe we have 84 years. However long, we live right now in the presence of God. And we do it through the Hope that the Spirit gives us. We gather her because God gives us himself. We live by the Word.

And we are sent to share that hope. Trusting in the power of God to see us though whatever tomorrow or the new year brings. Trusting in the power of God to one New Dawn to bring our hope to fulfillment.