

Sermon Academy November 16,2020

First Sunday after Christmas Day Luke 2:22-40

By the first of October Christmas is pretty much underway in stores and businesses. We always seem to be in a hurry to get Christmas started, if you watch Hallmark movies you know what I mean. We are in such a hurry to get to Christmas; and we should not be in a hurry to leave Christmas. A lot of people take their Christmas tree down the day after Christmas and act as if Christmas never happened. They remove all the visible signs of the celebration of Christmas.

The Gospel lesson for this day gives us an interesting aspect of the Christmas story. Eight days after Jesus is born he is taken to the temple to be dedicated to God as is laid out in the 12th chapter of Leviticus. Jesus is recognized as God's agent of salvation.

Something very special happens when Jesus is brought to the temple. There at the Temple is Simeon, a righteous and devout man who was filled with the Holy Spirit. When Mary and Joseph place Jesus into Simeon's arms he says, "With my own eyes I've seen your salvation; it's now out in the open for everyone to see: A God-revealing light to the non-Jewish nations, and of glory for your people Israel." This baby, Jesus, would bring the light of God into the world.

Joseph and Mary are dumbfounded; they don't know what to say. It's interesting that Simeon went on to bless them, and then says to Mary his mother, "This child marks both the failure and the recovery of many in Israel, a figure misunderstood and contradicted—the pain of the sword-thrust through you, Mary—but the rejection will force honesty, as God reveals who they really are."

Franciscan Priest Richard Rohr talks about the true self and the false self. The true is who we really are with God's help. The false self is who we often pretend to be. But hear what Simeon is saying, "the rejection of Jesus as the Son of God will force honesty as God reveals who we really are. It's true that often we don't want to reveal who we really are. The story of John Newton who wrote what is considered the greatest hymn of the faith "Amazing Grace" tells how Newton acknowledges the truth about himself that most of us can identify with, "Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see." John Newton had been the captain of a slave ship and then became a priest in the Church of England, now that's going from one extreme to the other for sure. When he experienced the Amazing Grace of God he had to face the truth about himself, knowing Jesus

causes us to look at who we really are, it forces honesty, and that is not always easy.

One of the questions we ask at Christmas is what did you get. I will ask my four grandchildren what did Santa Claus bring you? But the most important question is what did you give for Christmas.

One of the best hymns for this day is "In the Bleak Midwinter" number 221 in the hymnal. The last line gives us focus on what Christmas means, "What can I give, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb. If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part: yet what I can I give him: give my heart." That's the invitation of Christmas. Will we give Jesus our hearts, will we????