

What Did Anna and Simeon See?
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13:10

What do Simeon and Anna See?
Luke 2:22-40

How do you feel about being called old?

My 8 year old calls me an old lady and though I know he's kidding (he is kidding, right?!) I am slightly wounded. I am not an old lady!

But why is that a problem? Why does it bother me? Does it bother you to be called old? Age is, after all, relative and to an 8 year someone in their late 40s is old.

What's the problem with "old"?

In our culture age is the enemy. Half the ads we see show us products to keep us younger, smoother, less wrinkly, more active and able to jump out of airplanes or golf all day. "Be young forever," the ads say. Age is bad, they imply.

But why? Why is it bad to be old?

I understand that the aging process is difficult. My pinkies ache from December to April from arthritis. And age brings plenty of difficulties with body and mind.

But being old is a distinct phase in life. And it is actually a gift. We forget that sometimes. We forget that with age comes experience and wisdom even if it is of the sort, "well, I'm never going to do that again!"

Age brings the ability to see beyond the crisis of the moment and to the bigger picture. We might despair over political decisions of the moment and bad policies but when we step back, really step back, we can see that we are as a nation, as a people, as a church, making progress.

I spoke briefly with Anita Hill yesterday after Sylvia Ferrell-Jones' memorial service. Anita and Sylvia had been friends for 40 years. Anita reflected in our conversation that when we are young we can't see what we shall become. We don't know where life will take us or what lies in store. Even later when we are older we may look around and say how did we get here. And then reflect on that surprising journey.

Today's scripture tells us about Simeon and Anna, two old people who witness the miracle of Jesus as he is brought to the Temple to be dedicated.

This was a tradition that we can read about earlier in the Old Testament of our Bible where a family comes to present their first born son

After a woman gave birth she was considered ritually unclean by Levitical law and so the family had to wait about 40 days first. Then they could present the child and make an offering. The standard offering was a sheep and a pigeon or dove, but there was a dispensation if one could not afford a sheep: two doves or two pigeons. This is what Mary and Joseph offered so right away the text is telling us that this is not a wealthy or even middle class family. They are

poor. And although they would receive gold from the visiting kings, know that the three kings didn't even get there for another two years (despite our nativity sets and Christmas pageant) and so this family is giving their best.

So far all this is standard. Standard presentation at the Temple. Standard offering.

But then something unexpected happens. And it is in the unexpected that the brilliant light of Christ shines through.

There are two people there, two old people as our text tells us, really old for the time when one was lucky to make 40 years old. And these two see Jesus and joy burst forth from them. These two are old and because they are old they can see something in Jesus that no one else can.

One is Simeon, an old man who rejoices as he is now at peace. He has waited for the Messiah, waited and waited for the promise of a savior. The Holy Spirit has told him he would live to see this savior. He has waited a long time and now he has seen the Messiah, seen his destiny in this baby. Simeon knows. And in that knowing he has peace and says now, "God I am ready to die, ready to depart this world for I have seen what I have longed for and know that this is the child who will change everything just like you promised." His proclamation is captured in what has become one of the most well known prayers and liturgies in the Christian church called the Nunc Dimitis, Latin for "now you dismiss." We'll use it later in the service.

Then there is Anna, an even more interesting figure. The text says that she was married for a relatively short while, seven years, and then spent the rest of her long long life as a widow. This is highly unusual as widows were usually despised and sought to remarry quickly because they had no way to support themselves. But Anna is here at the Temple and obviously she belongs here in some special way.

When she sees Jesus she forecasts the future. What this child will do. Who this child will be. All that lies in store.

So we have Simeon looking at the past and the fulfillment of what God has promised in the past. And we have Anna looking at the future and all that lies ahead: what fulfillment of God's promise will mean.

It is like a hinge on a door with the past and the future coming together in this moment. And Jesus is the pin holding the two sides together. Jesus--the fulfillment of the past and the embodiment of the future.

The history and the future together. And who sees it but these two old people-elders at the temple.

I want to lift this up today as we as a church move into the spring and an examination of Pilgrim's past and future as part of the interim process. Later this month there will be an opportunity after worship for small groups to come together and look at Pilgrim's past. What great things were accomplished? What ministry was done in Christ's name in this place? What challenges were faced? What patterns do we see?

For it is in knowing who you have been that you can get more clarity on who you might become. It is in seeing God's fingerprints on the lives transformed here that you get a sense of how God is calling this congregation forth again.

For some of that work we need our elders, our folks who have been here at Pilgrim for a long time and can speak about what happened as they have seen it and been a part of it. The elders

here are the ones who carry us forward by sharing the longing and fulfillment of past hopes and dreams. By sharing the mistakes and sorrows and what was learned. By showing that being present in the life of the church over a long time is part of what being a person of faith can be about.

Simeon and Anna shared gifts that no one else could. Perspective. Joy in seeing God's promise come to be after long, long years waiting. A window into the future tempered by what had come before. And what is possible.

One of my favorite Dr. Martin Luther King quotes is that "the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice." Yes. And we need to be old to actually see that come to pass.

Those of us who don't have that wisdom from experience do well to listen to what was, what has come before, and what is remembered. Wisdom by proxy in a sense. That we too can grow and learn and receive the blessing of our elders.

Many of you probably remember Captain Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger III, who at 58, skillfully splashed US Airways Flight 1549 into the Hudson River on January 15—saving all 155 passengers and crew in the process—

When asked, he had a simple, yet compelling, explanation. "One way of looking at this might be that, for 42 years, I've been making small, regular deposits in this bank of experience: education and training. And on January 15 the balance was sufficient so that I could make a very large withdrawal." (reader's digest online)

In the months ahead we will be making a significant withdrawal as you think about Pilgrim's past so we can fully envision Pilgrim's future. It takes all of us to do it. But the wisdom of our elders here at Pilgrim will be an invaluable voice that only experience born out of watching and waiting and participating can bring.

For we, too, on this day after Epiphany when we celebrate Christ's light moving out into the world. "Our eyes have seen God's salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." The light shines for us, too.

Amen.