

Dear Friends,

Luke 2: 25-29

Mary and Joseph are carrying out their religious duties in the temple in Jerusalem. They are presenting their baby, Jesus, to God. Two elderly people have been led to the temple at the same time. One of them is Simeon. We are told that "the Holy Spirit rested on him". In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God tended to come and go. It was rare for someone to be continually in the Spirit. The ideal for Christians is given to us in the letter to the Ephesians where we are called to "be filled with the Spirit". This being filled is not a one off, but is something that is to continue taking place. The idea is that you are always in need of fresh supplies. In each and every moment therefore, you are called to be open to God who fills and goes on filling you with the Spirit.

Maybe that was how it was for Simeon. It led him to be responsive to God's leading which brought him into the temple at exactly the right moment. When he saw Jesus, he took him in his arms. Luke has already told us that there was no room for Jesus in the inn or the guest room. You are therefore called to make of yourself a guest room where Jesus is welcome. Luke also told us that Jesus was laid in the manger. You are called to make of your heart a manger where Jesus may be laid. Now he tells us of Simeon taking Jesus in his arms. You are called to receive Jesus into your embrace.

What God asks from you God gives to you. God makes room for you; the eternal God who is your dwelling place welcomes you. God's heart is a manger where you may rest. You are held in God's embrace, in the everlasting arms of God.

While Simeon is holding Jesus, he offers a prayer. He says, "Master, now you let your servant go in peace". Simeon realises that the moment has come when he can die in peace. The idea of peace is important to Luke. We are only in chapter two of his book and already this is the third time that he has used the word. The first time was at the naming of John the Baptist. On that occasion, Zechariah talks of how John will prepare the way for one who will guide people to peace. The second time we hear of peace is from the angels who sing of how the birth of Jesus brings peace on earth. This peace is for the whole creation and is therefore for each individual. So, in this third use of peace we hear of one individual, Simeon, who knows that he may feel at ease and die well because he has been given the gift of peace.

I have written about how God does not want us to be frightened or afraid. On three occasions God's message to people has been "Do not be afraid". Simeon reminds us that God may not take away the things that we fear. What we may hope is that God will be with us as we face them and go through them. Simeon is facing death. We naturally fear the grief that comes from the deaths of those we love. We may also fear our own death. There is no way around these. Death is always with us. Simeon shows us that by the grace of God we may face death and our other fears with peace. Even though you walk through the darkest valley, you need fear no evil, for God your shepherd is with you. You may also face your fears with hope. Jesus

reminds you that in God's house there are many dwelling places. He goes to prepare a place for you, so that where he is, there you may be also.

Simeon holds the child in his arms. He feels the peace of God that passes all understanding. He knows it for himself. The Spirit rests on him and gives him insights into what the peace that the child gives will mean to the world. He feels these insights forming into words which he has to share. He speaks and Mary and Joseph are amazed at what he says. They are astonished to hear the things that their child will achieve.

God bless you,

Tony