

Dear Friends,

Luke 2: 34

Simeon is telling Mary what lies ahead for her child, Jesus. Simeon says that he will cause "the falling and the rising of many". There could be two groups of people, one that is made to fall, while the other is made to rise. But it could also be that it is the same people who Jesus makes both to fall and to rise. He brings them down in order to get them to where they need to be so that they can be raised up?

Those who Jesus calls the poor in spirit don't mind starting off in what you might call a low place. They know that they need God. They are ready to depend upon God for everything. They have decided that there is nowhere else for them to turn except to God. They make themselves open to God and ready to receive from God. Their constant prayer is "O God come to my aid. O Lord make haste to help me".

By contrast there are some who want to occupy a high place. They have an unhealthy pride. They think it is weak to reach out to other people or to God. They feel that they do not need anyone else and they certainly do not need God. They keep themselves closed. They have no need to receive from anyone.

When we place ourselves up high, life tends to knock us down. We come face to face with our weakness. Maybe we confront the frailty of our bodies; perhaps we look in the mirror and realise that we are not as good as we hoped; maybe we find that the plan for our lives, which seemed to be going smoothly, is knocked off course by unexpected events which we could not have anticipated. We find that we have fallen and we know that we are in need. This is often God's opportunity.

The example of The Prodigal Son comes to mind. He wants his share of the inheritance that he should not get until his father dies. He wants that straight away. He wants it all and he wants it now. His father does what he asks. When the son sets out, he is full of himself. He has everything that he needs. He is up high with the world at his feet. But he squanders everything. Circumstances act against him when the land is hit by a famine. He falls to his lowest point. He ends up in a pigsty, taking care of the pigs and wishing he could eat their food. When he's down, he realises his need, and he knows where he has to turn. He comes to his senses, turns back to his father, and goes home. He is not sure if he will be accepted. He only dares to ask to be taken back as a slave.

His father has been waiting for him and watching for his return. He sees him coming and runs to meet him. He pays no attention to the prepared apology. He embraces and kisses him. He calls for him to be dressed in the best clothes, for a ring to be placed on his finger and shoes on his feet. He puts on a party where his son and all the guests eat the best food.

Perhaps it was necessary for the son to fall. Maybe his relationship with his father was better and stronger because of his experience. To begin with he had taken his father for granted. He had seen him only for what he could get out of him. But he

had come to a fuller and deeper appreciation. He had learnt to value the relationship that he had with his father. He had received love and had grown in love.

Does that stretch the story too far? Maybe. The son does get a lot out of returning home. But perhaps you can see where I'm going. Jesus sometimes allows us to fall, maybe even makes us fall, in order to bring us to the place where we come to our senses and turn again to him. It is then that we rise and perhaps rise to a higher place than that from which we had fallen. The aim is to get you to where you need to be. Where you need to be is open to God, with God in you and you in God; where you love God, not for what you can get out of God, but for God's own sake.

Simeon tells Mary that Jesus will cause "the falling and the rising of many". Yes, he makes some fall sometimes. But he only causes them to fall because it is necessary in order to bring about his hope of making all rise.

God bless you,

Tony