

Luke 2: 22 – 40 The meaning of peace

I wonder what you do on Sunday evenings – do you have a regular ritual?. With us nowadays its dinner with the family, and helping get the grandchildren to bed; and then a quietly exhausted drive home, listening to dreadful Sunday night favourites on the car radio until we can stand it no longer; home, bin out, in bed.

Many people used to go to evening service on a Sunday – and it was a lovely way to end the day. Our song of Simeon – the Nunc Dimittis in Latin – was always sung in Anglican evensong

Lord Now dismiss your servant in peace. Old Simeon was praying; my long watch on earth is done; now Lord dismiss me in peace.

But it could be everyone's prayer on Sunday evening; now may we rest peacefully; tomorrow help us take up our work again. Now; rest without anxiety; tomorrow, the battle renewed.

But what are we talking when we talk about peace. Is it a feeling; a state of affairs; the absence of conflict; the presence of something; the effect of something?

We say, I just need a bit of peace; o leave me in peace; I wish I was at peace with the world. Why do we put on tombstones – at peace, if peace wasn't something we lack dreadfully.

I don't think you need me to spell out how unpeaceful, restless and disturbed our world is. What do we learn from old Simeon's peace?

The promise God made to Simeon was – you will see the Lord's Messiah

Somehow on that day, guided by the Spirit, Simeon came to the temple and recognised in the presence of this baby the presence of the Messiah.

And Simeon's prayer says, I can depart in peace because -

my eyes have seen your salvation

This person – this baby – is himself God's salvation; the Messiah

But what are we talking about when we talk about the Messiah?

the word Messiah means the anointed one, and that word anointed carries two ideas – the one anointed by the Holy Spirit is

-the one in whom the holy spirit is entirely present;

-and the one who rules, who brings the kingdom, the rule of God among us.

The Messiah's rule brings salvation

But what are we talking about when we talk about salvation

Salvation is the act of God, and the process by which God frees us from everything that is not of God.

– **everything not of God – what does that mean.**

Well just think of the 10 commandments

You shall not bear false witness – everything that is deceptive, false, lying, hidden, conspiratorial,

You shall not commit adultery – everything that is a betrayal, a double dealing, every broken promise, every giving of ourselves and our bodies to harmful impulses instead of God

You shall not murder – everything that destroys, tramples, violates, kills

You shall not steal – everything that takes what is precious from people – that robs them of dignity, power, independence, that exploits them, that demands more than they can give

These things are not of God

So does salvation mean that none of these things will happen to us – well yes, eventually, in the new heavens and the new earth!

But in this world – salvation is God freeing us from the hold of those wrong things over our hearts, from our tendency in the direction of darkness. It is our own darkness that God's light comes to, our own selfishness and lack of love, lack of grace.

Salvation, through the Messiah, Jesus, is sharing in the light of God. God comes to us. It means that anxieties about life, the future, about meaning and our purpose are put to rest; that fear of the unknown is gone because it is not unknown to God; dread of dark powers, horror of death, no longer belong to us.

We do not know the answers – but we know God is saving us.

And we have an answer to our guilt, to the wrong things we have done; we have an answer to hatred and revenge as they grip our souls and radiate hatred. We can forgive – because we know we are forgiven, because that power of God has touched our souls. We are able to release other souls from the offences they have done to us.

This is the process of salvation – we receive light – we shine the light.

And salvation is more than the renewing of our own hearts. It is being drawn into God's kingdom and God's way of good. So salvation leads us into being zealous, keen to good to others, to give help, to go the extra mile, to speak against injustice, to side with people being picked on, as God does.

Salvation can't be selfish; it's for all the world – because we are made part of God's kingdom we work with the Messiah for the world – or rather he works in and through us.

Simeon was a Jew – but he knew that God's salvation was all for all peoples, as Isaiah taught in his prophecies – *in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the nations, and for glory for the Jewish people*

So peace then – the result of salvation, the work of the Messiah

Simeon was at peace; because he could see that God's salvation had come in Jesus. And this is the true ground of peace for us.

Simeon said to Mary, *a sword will pierce through your own heart also*. Suffering lay ahead – Christ's suffering – and the suffering of those who followed him. To be in this world as part of God's salvation does mean entering into suffering for the world. So true peace in this world does not exclude suffering and pain – that has to wait for the new world. And yet we do have fundamental

peace with God now – peace because Jesus Christ suffered for us on the cross; he rose from the dead, and is with us by his Holy Spirit.

The son of God has made us his own, by his life given for us; he has made us children of God, he has given us his spirit – and so we are in fact in a place of peace. We are given the principle of peace in our spirits.

Live out of that peace which does belong to you, by rights. Don't live out of fear; out of greed; out of anger; out of despair; live out of the gift of God promised to you; trust in him; he is faithful; he will do it.

Lay down in peace each night, confident that he is working in you; get up in the morning and go back into the fight of daily life, trusting that he will take your small flickering light, your weak and inconsistent desire for his righteousness and strengthen it, strengthen you in the choices and decision and reactions you make tomorrow, and the next day and the next. Salvation and peace are won for you by Jesus at the cross; salvation and peace work out through you in the challenge of daily life, as you represent the presence of the kingdom of God in your own place. Amen