

Light Beyond Our Expectations

Text: Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Galatians 4:4-7 (Series B, 1st Sunday after Christmas) Ps. 148

Luke 2:22-40

Prayer:

Today is a day of new beginnings. We will never see the year 2020 again. Let me ask you a question: Have you ever looked forward to something and when it happened, it was so much more than you anticipated? Maybe this was your experience at the time of your marriage or the birth of your first child, or a new job. We all have dreams that we live into.

We all have dreams that call us to get up in the morning and lead our lives. Some examples in history are dramatic, for instance David Livingstone, the explorer and missionary to central Africa in the mid-1800s set out to see what no other European had seen. What Livingstone saw was so much more than he could imagine.

In his journal he tells about his discovery of the great falls, which he named the Victoria Falls, and what that experience meant to him. He had heard from the natives that there was something up the river, but he was not sure what it was. He could hear the roar of the falls for miles and he could see the spray five miles away.

He said he could never explain the splendour that fell upon his soul when he looked on the falls for the first time. Suddenly, right before his eyes, the Zambezi River was a mile wide; it sloped slightly and then cascaded in a 400-foot plunge in a display of awesome splendour. He said for several minutes the sight literally paralysed him. He knew that something was ahead but his discovery was far beyond his wildest imagination.

This is what happened to Simeon in the text. He knew the Messiah was coming and he waited and prayed for the day to arrive. He was told by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he would see the Lord's Messiah.

Every time parents brought their children to the Temple he was filled with anticipation that possibly one of them was the child he was waiting for. Then Mary and Joseph arrived at the Temple and Simeon, now an old man, took the child up into his arms and praised God saying:

Master, now dismiss your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all peoples. The scene is a moving one: an old man now ready to die holding a six-week-old baby, who is at long last "the salvation for all people." You see, even though Jesus was only an infant, God was still speaking to us.

The basis for the sermon for today are the two Bible verses immediately prior to the gospel story of Simeon and Anna. We remember that Simeon was an old man, waiting to see the Messiah. He didn't see any miracles; he didn't see any signs; he didn't see any wonders.

He simply saw the baby Jesus and he said, "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation which has been prepared for all people. No miracles. No signs. No wonders. He just saw the Christ child. He believed and that was enough.

Then we have the story of old Anna, who was eighty four years old. She was a widow and poor. For her also, there were no miracles, no signs, no wonders. All she saw was the Christ child and she too believed. *Anna served God with fasting and prayers night and day.* This is evidently a woman who loves the house of God. *'She departed not from the temple: we are told.*

She felt she was never so near to God as when she was in God's house, it was indeed for her, holy Ground. She knew the meaning of David's wonderful words. *'My soul longs, yea, even faints for the courts of the Lord.'* Psalm 84 vs. 2.

Anna was a woman of great self-denial, she served God with fasting and prayer, she was continually keeping her flesh under subjection. Evidently she was never tired or weary in praying for others and praying for the fulfilment of the promises concerning the Messiah.

Some time ago, a man without much money – was upset with his four-year-old daughter wasting a whole roll of gold gift-wrapping paper. He thought the paper was wasted because she wrapped a small box with the golden paper and put it under the Christmas tree.

The next morning, Christmas Day, the little girl took the gift and gave it to her father and said, "This is for you, Daddy." The man felt embarrassed because of his previous day's fury. Sadly, he got angry again when he saw there was nothing inside the little box! Once more he heard himself yelling: "Don't you know that when someone gives a gift, they usually put something inside?"

The little girl looked up with tears in her eyes and said, "But Daddy, the box wasn't empty. I blew kisses into the box, and I did it all for only you." The father was deeply ashamed. He hugged his daughter and asked her to forgive him.

The story says the man kept the little box next to his bed for many years. That way whenever he felt sad, angry or depressed, he would look at the little box and take out one of the imaginary kisses his daughter had put in there. It was a permanent reminder of the love his daughter felt for him.

In a very simple but significant way, every human being has received a little, golden box filled with unconditional love. The Bible says, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

God, our Father, gave all of His love to us in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ. In our Saviour He gave us a new life, forgiveness and salvation. This Christmas -- and forever -- we who are saved are able to rejoice because of this great gift; we are able to be thankful for such a sacrifice.

Because of Jesus and all that He has done, whenever we feel sad or discouraged, let us turn to the Scriptures. In the Saviour's story, may we find a reminder of God's great gift of salvation and the Holy Spirit's encouragement for the living of each day.

So, on a day of making New Year's resolutions, we're reminded of the power of faith to equip us to live life to its eternal end. For real life is not in *our* control. It's in the hands of our Lord.

So, let this be our resolve. We don't let the challenges, even the fears of the moment, dissuade us from the confidence that comes by faith in Jesus. God will have the last say in every human being's life!

Let the knowledge of that one thing of knowing Jesus as our Saviour, let it comfort us and guide us in our life today. Say yes today to Christ and have the power to look back on our life with joy, joy through His forgiving grace and to look forward towards the future with resurrection confidence because we know that your Saviour will have the last word in your life!

Like Simeon and Anna may we all behold the miracle of the Christ in our hearts. May 2021 be the year that we all can say with Paul, this year, in Christ, we will "fight the good fight, we will keep the faith." And we know that because of His grace, there is already a victory crown in heaven with our name, my name on it. Amen.

December 27, 2020