

Pastor Roy's sermon from March 15, 2015

Israel in the wilderness: There is grumbling, snakes, confession, mercy, and renewed life. Paul confesses that despite it all, God saves us by grace and raises us up and seats us with Christ in a newness of life which is good and full. John fills out Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus to include Jesus being lifted up as the serpent in the wilderness for the life and salvation of all who look to him. God's mercy is the life of the Israelites, the Jews, and all the Gentiles who seek it.

The mercy of God is throughout the Scriptures and throughout all of creation. This mercy can be no more limited than the sunshine, rain, gravity, or plants growing when conditions are right. Mercy from God in all of life is simply a matter of fact. It cannot be turned down or off, or discouraged, or offended. It may be denied, hidden, forsaken and ignored, but God continues to work the wonders of merciful love and justice with or without our cooperation. No one can undermine the efforts of life giving abundance as the Spirit of Mercy works her wonders of peace.

This grace is summed up well in the song of Simeon after he sees the baby Jesus in Luke. This time of the year, we conclude our communion services with this song--having worshipped God and having met our Lord Jesus Christ we are sent with this grand benediction. Comforted and challenged in our faith by his Presence and called to be and do likewise--we go. Simeon's grateful prayer is also spoken or chanted in the compline service we have been using after our studies and soup suppers on Wednesday nights. It is a final confession of faith at the close of the day. All is well. We are ready for whatever the night may bring. We are enveloped in mercy as were the Israelites in the wilderness and all who freely receive Jesus' love from the cross.

Lord, you now have set your servant free to go in peace as you have promised;
For these eyes of mine have seen the savior, whom you have prepared for all the world to see.
A Light to enlighten the nations, and the glory of your people Israel.

This canticle is both a preparation for rest and for action. Good order for living is faith, rest, action. We cannot rest without faith. And we cannot act faithfully without rest. Holy action, faithful service grows out of trust, healing, and passion for what God is doing. Rest in faith brings us closer to a holy perspective, to the perspective of justice, mercy, and love.

So the same prayer of Simeon which sends us from worship is also the prayer that prepares us for sleep, so that the next day we might enter into mercy filled service. It is the cycle of life. Faithful rest/faithful action/faithful rest/faithful action.

Simeon's words. "Lord, you now have set your servant free to go in peace as you have promised." Opening ourselves to the presence of God sets us free. Learning to trust the presence of God is a matter of teaching ourselves to see and hear God. A merciful presence bestowing freedom. Free to be our true self in God's sight. Set free to live our families, friends, and neighbors into this same peace. It's not something we muster up. It simply is. Our part is mindfulness. Without mindfulness, sure, mercy exists; but we can't know its freedom. Without this awareness, we live in denial and in ignorance of God's freedom which is so close to us--just out of reach until we learn to see it and embrace it.

"For these eyes of mine have seen the savior, whom you have prepared for all the world to see." We learn to see Jesus Christ in the bread and wine. We learn to see Jesus when we look at one another. We meet Jesus in the water of the baptismal font. We see the savior, drop our bondages, our fears, our needs, our mistrust, our frustration, and we begin to taste sweet freedom. Freedom to be as we truly are in the sight

of God. Our true self. That is freedom indeed. “For these eyes of mine have seen the savior, whom you have prepared for all the world to see.” Having seen the savior, we are ready. Ready to live. Ready to die. We find our life in seeing the savior and the beautiful creation of which we are a part. Then we are ready to live and die. We are free.

“A Light to enlighten the nations, and the glory of your people Israel.” A light for darkness and night, depression and all that stands between me and you and freedom and hope. In Christ is the light of hope for us and for the nations. In Christ is the light of love and mercy. In Christ is friendship and rest. All that we truly seek is found in mercy, in Christ.

Desperate, the Israelites look to the serpent on the pole, and they are healed. We hear the holy ramblings of the writer of Ephesians, we see such gratitude for the mercy of God in Christ. We look to Christ in his life and on the cross, and we have hope and grace for our struggles and questions and frustrations.

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