

Last Sunday, I was sitting in the fellowship hall when the Bauermanns walked in with baby Warren, and it was just the best thing. There’s just something about a baby. Warren was awake and aware and you can probably guess the reaction. Several people wanted to reach out and hold him, and they got to. That was very gracious on the part of his parents. And there was such joy in the simple connection of having this little life in your arms. I had to smile because, well, you’ll see.

In today’s gospel lesson from Luke 2, we meet a man named Simeon. Luke introduces us to him like this: “Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.”

Now, right away, you might be thinking, ‘Wait a minute. I think we just heard this story, didn’t we? In fact, Pastor, you did one of those first-person narrative sermons about it.’ And you know what? If that crossed your mind, kudos to you, you are correct. So why look at this story again? Is this the churchly version of the Bill Murray movie *Groundhog Day*?

No, not quite. Today, February 2nd, is exactly forty days removed from Christmas Day, which coincides with the precise amount of time that passed between Jesus’ birth and the prescribed time for mother and son to go to the Temple for rituals of purification and presentation. This represents the actual amount of time that would’ve passed. This occasion creates the opportunity for us to see old man Simeon holding the baby, which is a beautiful heartwarming scene. That’s why I was smiling in the fellowship hall, because I was connecting these things, and what I would like to impress on you this morning is that this picture of Simeon with little Jesus in his arms is a complete picture of life with Christ.

Now remember, the Holy Spirit had let Simeon know that he would not die before seeing the Lord’s Christ. And one day, which we know to be forty days after Jesus’ birth, Simeon is led by the Spirit to the temple, and just like that, the wait was over. The baby Jesus was there with his parents, and filled with the Spirit, Simeon took Jesus in his arms and blessed God with these words: “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

Simeon got to hold the baby. It was everything he hoped for and more. There was a special life in his arms. He said, “my eyes have seen your salvation...” In one bright moment of light, he saw what God was up to. Jesus was salvation. Jesus was the consolation he had been waiting for. His eyes saw a baby boy; his heart and mind, filled with the Spirit knew something even greater. Simeon holds this baby in his arms and proclaims for all to hear that this child, Jesus, is salvation for all people, Jew and Gentile. To have and to hold this Jesus is to have every promise of God fulfilled. To hold Jesus in faith is to have everything.

Are you holding onto Jesus in faith? How do you know if you are?

To hold Jesus in faith is to trust in both the simplest and also the deepest way that Jesus is salvation. In other words, He doesn't give you a list of rules to follow to get salvation; he is salvation. He doesn't give you advice for a better life; Jesus is life; life that never ends. The Bible teaches that you cannot produce salvation by what you do; no matter how nice you are to people; no matter how successful you are or how many people look up to you, you cannot redeem yourself.

To hold Jesus is to feel genuine joy in your connection to Him. It means believing that Jesus paid for your sins at his cross. It means trusting that you will follow Jesus out of the grave, thanks to his Easter victory. It means that knowing, loving, and serving Jesus is the point of your life, and that he is your consolation. He is your reward. And as Simeon reminds us, Jesus is not just your consolation and reward, but the consolation and reward of the whole world. He is light and glory for all.

To hold Jesus in faith is to have in your grasp the greatest gift imaginable. Do you understand what I mean by that? Simeon explains it. *Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace.* That's what he said. Not only was his wait over, but at whatever time God had appointed he could depart in peace. Not just depart the temple in peace. Depart this life in peace. Because anything potentially preventing that from happening would be paid for by Jesus. This is why I can say that to hold Jesus in faith is to have everything.

This past week, I'm sure you heard the horrible news of the plane and helicopter disaster that took place in our nation's capital. It's a deeply saddening thing to consider. We are right to pray for the families, for the first responders and those involved in the recovery efforts. And, to have and to hold Jesus means that I can get on a plane tomorrow and be prepared to depart in peace. I certainly hope I reach the earthly destination I bought the ticket for. But if for some reason I don't, I have full trust that Jesus purchased my ticket for heaven. By faith, I hold in my hands the One who will take me there. Do you see what Simeon saw?

I'm sure you can apply this to whatever you're going through right now. Perhaps it's a diagnosis and treatment or surgery. Maybe it's a relationship that's on shaky ground. Maybe it just feels like you're hitting roadblocks at every turn. But to hold Jesus in faith means you're trusting Him for final and ultimate victory. And if you're convinced He has the final victory, and will share it with you, that can change your present. That has the power to change your now. The circumstances may not change, but your outlook will, with the life of the world in your arms.