

“A Song of the Heart”
Luke 2:25-38
Rev. David Hutchinson
Sunday, December 29, 2019

“When I get older, losing my hair...

...many years from now.

Will you still be sending me a valentine?

A birthday greeting, or bottle of wine?

If I've been out till quarter to three, will you lock the door?

Will you still need me, will you still feed me...?

When I'm EIGHTY-FOUR!”

I imagine that Anna did NOT wonder about these questions.

We meet Anna in chapter 2 of Luke's gospel.

She is 84 years old - - 20 years beyond the 64 of the Beatles song.

At 84 - - she was a widow, it says in Luke's gospel.

So there was no one to ask permission to stay out late - - anymore.

So I imagine she did not ask the questions from that song.

The other person we meet is Simeon.

Simeon is also old - - and facing the end of his life.

But Simeon - - maybe still had some questions.

It says Simeon wanted to depart this life - - in peace.

So I assume - - he was NOT totally at peace - - yet.

Anna on the other hand - - seems to have found peace pretty quickly.

UNLIKE Simeon, she told everyone about Jesus.

It says that she did NOT DEPART from the temple.

So - - she was DEVOTED to God.

BUT she told everyone who came TO the Temple seeking - -
that the search was over!

When she SAW this child Jesus with his parents - - she knew.

She knew that in Jesus - - was consolation and redemption.

The very consolation and redemption she had been waiting for all her life.

For 84 years - - she had been devoted to God - - and waiting.

Now - - at the END of her life - - FINALLY it happens!

So Anna was LIKE Simeon in that they were both devoted to God.

And they both spent time in the Temple - - waiting.

And they were both waiting for consolation and redemption for their people.

And they were BOTH probably over 80 years old.

But - - Luke tells us that Anna did not DEPART from the Temple.

And that Simeon wanted to DEPART from this life - - in peace.

But HOW do you do that?

How do you depart - - this life - - in peace?

Simeon got there - - by holding the child Jesus - - in his arms.

Simeon looked at that child and saw the salvation he had been waiting for.

And Simeon blessed Jesus' parents.

And then Simeon seemed ready to depart - - mostly.

However - - Simeon ominously predicted that Jesus would REVEAL things.

A sword would pierce the souls of people - - in the future - - Simeon says.

The THOUGHTS - - of MANY HEARTS - - would be revealed.

What does THAT mean?

It seems that EVEN if Simeon was ready to depart in peace...

He was saying that the WORLD - - was not going to be totally at PEACE.

At least not for a while.

So - - how does a person - - DEPART this life in peace?

What does it take?

AND - - IF your heart were REVEALED in the light of Jesus...

...what would be there?

Peace?

The great poet T. S. Eliot reflected on this text in a poem called:

“A Song for Simeon”

The way Eliot described Simeon’s life was with the phrase:

“dust in sunlight”

You know how sometimes a sunbeam shining in a window reveals DUST in a room? / This was the circumstance Eliot was describing. / St. John of the Cross described the same thing in “Dark Night of the Soul” as a way to think about how God’s LIGHT - - shines THROUGH the IMPEFECTIONS - - of human life.

According to this 16th century monk - - St. John:

The dust is revealed more clearly when the light shines.

AND - - the LIGHT is also revealed more clearly - - because of the DUST!

As imperfections present themselves - - we grow more conscious of the light.

Light that is pure and invisible - - becomes visible when it reflects off the impurities in the soul - - like a ray of sunlight is better seen when shining through dust.

Maybe that is what Simeon meant when he said:

“The thoughts of many hearts will be revealed”.

Maybe Luke wrote the gospel - - wondering about these things.

In any case - - T. S. Eliot - - connected Simeon to this image:

Dust in sunlight.

Or “dustlight” - - as it is sometimes called.

All we are is - - dust in sunlight.

I think it’s a more HOPEFUL image than that old Kansas rock song, “Dust in the Wind”. / We may all go back to dust - - ashes to ashes - - dust to dust - - BUT - - we are not JUST dust - - in the wind. / We are - - dust - - in sunlight.

Does THAT image give you peace?

Could it be part of how Simeon prepared himself to DEPART in PEACE?

And how can WE - - depart in peace?

That’s where this text takes me: to these questions.

AND - - I think - - that however much Simeon FELT that he was DUST - - deep in his soul - - his hope was in the sunlight - - or the light of Christ. / After all it is JUST at the point that he HOLDS the child Jesus in his arms - - that he SINGS his SONG to God - - his song of salvation.

Simeon SINGS:

Let your servant depart in peace...

For my EYES have seen...your salvation!

My eyes have seen - - this child - - who is:

LIGHT to the Gentiles

GLORY to the people of Israel.

Holding the child Jesus at that moment - - seems to be what brings Simeon peace.

Mary Oliver describes something similar in her poem: "When Death Comes".

"When it's over, I want to say: all my life

I was a bride married to amazement.

I was the bridegroom - - taking the world into my arms".

Imagine taking the world into your arms - - as she says.

And then - - imagine Simeon - - taking the child Jesus into HIS arms.

And then LISTEN to how Mary Oliver concludes her poem:

"When it's over, I don't want to wonder

if I have made of my life something particular, and real.

I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened,

or full of argument.

I don't want to end up simply having visited this world."

As I hear her poem I wonder: Am I just a visitor to my life?

Are you?

Can you fall in love with your life again?

Can you fall in love with God again?

Can you fall in love - - with the universe?

The orchestra is playing

the last waltz..... are you ready?

“The orchestra playing
 the last waltz
 at three o’clock
 in the morning
 in the Kingdom of Pythias Hall
 in Hartland, New Brunswick,
 Canada, North America,
 world, solar system,
 Center of the universe - -”

This poem called “the Last Waltz” by Alden Nowlan seems to describe people who are ready - - for life to end - - and to be at peace with it.

Maybe sometimes it seems like the universe is off kilter.

Maybe you feel like there is no center to anything in your life.

But something as simple as taking someone who is beloved into your arms - - could change that. / It could center your universe.

It could open your eyes NOT ONLY to the DUST that your life is...

But also to the sunlight.

Dust in sunlight.

Finding a way to depart in peace does not have to be difficult.

After worship today we fill totes for our Boxing Day project.

The totes are given to people in need and are filled with soap and washcloths and sometimes hats. / Boxing Day is only one way we try to help others.

The women's circle at Plymouth buys socks and underwear for at risk children and gives them the DHS. / And some of you remember the project that Shirley Eaton recently called to mind for us: "Open End", which helped distribute clothes to children's services.

Think of all the children who are helped by these three programs.

I can't think of a better way to take the world into our arms.

It might be as simple as a pair of socks or a wash cloth.

But there really IS more to this life than DUST.

We ARE dust - - and to DUST we DO return.

But there is ALSO - - sunlight.

Amen.