



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY, FEBRUARY 2, 2025
ISAIAH 6:1-8; PSALM 138; 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11; LUKE 5:1-11

KEEP SHOWING UP!

***Luke 5:1-11** [Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.]*

Do you remember where you were 40 days ago? Think about it. Where were you 40 days ago? There's a chance that you and 2600 of your closest friends were standing in this cathedral in the dark, holding a lit candle, while singing *Silent Night*. That's right, Christmas Eve was 40 days ago. Today is the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple. In some churches, this is the last day of the Christmas season. One of the options for today, is to bless all the candles

that we will use at church this year and to process with lit candles at the beginning of our Eucharistic services. It's known as a Candlemas procession. We are not doing that this year but will keep it on our radar for the future. Astronomically, we are exactly halfway between the winter solstice and the vernal equinox. Many cultures of the earth have a special holiday to mark this seasonal transition. In the U.S., we have Groundhog Day. In Seattle, we make note

that the sun finally is setting after 5 pm. It's a big day all around.

I can't tell you how many people spoke to me about their positive experiences of Christmas Eve this year. One woman, in her 80's told me that she had a profound spiritual experience while holding her candle in the dark and singing *Silent Night*. She said, "I felt so close to God. It was as if God was holding me in a loving embrace. I had the sense that everything has changed." I have been haunted by her words over these past 40 days, "everything has changed." But now, 40 days after she spoke these words, we are living in a different changed reality.

I am also hearing from many of you how you believe everything has changed in our country and our world. Many of us are confused, bewildered, angry and frightened as our sacred institutions and expected codes of behavior have been abandoned or severely weakened. For many, it's a time of chaos and disruption. It feels as if everything has changed, and not for the better. It's an anxious and uncertain time. A time full of grief.

What are we to make of this and how does this feast speak to us today? Mary and Joseph follow religious tradition and custom by presenting Jesus in the temple. Mary had to wait 40 days after giving birth to undergo

purification rituals so that she could engage in right worship in the temple. They show up in Jerusalem and dedicate Jesus to God. This is what the law required. Technically, they were meant to leave the baby in the temple, but they could "redeem" him by offering a substitute sacrifice instead. Leviticus said they were to offer 5 shekels, a lamb, and a dove, but if the family is poor, they can sacrifice 2 doves. Mary and Joseph offer 2 turtledoves because they are poor.

This is a reminder that Jesus was born as a person of color to itinerant parents, part of a religious minority in an occupied territory – an oppressed person. In Matthew's Gospel, the family becomes refugees as they flee a cruel despot who is trying to kill the baby. They are migrants who seek refuge and safety in a foreign land – Egypt. Thank God the Egyptians accepted them. But we are hearing from Luke's Gospel today. It's a happier story. Luke's Gospel has a different drama, and it revolves around the temple. The Gospel begins and ends in the temple and Jesus is often there, even as a child.

There is so much irony, paradox, and theological richness in this feast. Hang in there with me. Jesus, God in the flesh, is presented by his human parents in the temple. For Jews, the temple is the place where God dwells. It's the place where

divinity and humanity meet. But Jesus, is a Divine Person who is fully human and fully divine. He is the new temple, a new place where divinity meets humanity. Jesus is dedicated to God because, as the first-born, he belongs to God, but he is God. And here's the point of this feast. It's not about Jesus. **It's about us.** Because of the Incarnation that we celebrate at Christmas, divinity is wedded to humanity by a bond that can never be broken. The baby Jesus, in his humanity, gathers all of us, all of creation, and, indeed, the entire cosmos and offers it to God. Mary and Joseph present Jesus in the temple, but Jesus is offering all of creation to God, in an everlasting offering of praise and thanksgiving. The one being presented is presenting us and all of creation to God, for all of eternity. Now I totally agree with my friend from Christmas Eve, "everything has changed."

But our lives are messy. Humanity isn't perfect. We are broken and sinful. We live under the rule of unjust empires, and we mete out cruelty to others. Yet this is what God took up in the person of Jesus, a vulnerable baby of color, born poor in an occupied territory. This is the source of our hope and our redemption.

Simeon and Anna. We are given this incredible image of these two ancient people

in the temple, waiting in joyful expectation for their hope and redemption. Anna essentially lived in the temple, praying and fasting day and night. Simeon is told that he will not be dismissed from this life until he has seen the Messiah. I just love the image of him taking the baby Jesus in his arms, a man at the end of his life lifting him up a newborn and praising God by saying:

"My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

And Anna becomes the first evangelist, praising God and to speaking "about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem."

Anna and Simeon would say, because of Jesus, "everything has changed."

Such powerful images of fulfillment and hope. But to me, the real miracle here is that they kept showing up. Anna and Simeon continued to be vigilant and attentive. They continued to trust the promise. They continued to wait with hope and expectation. They never despaired. They never walked away from the promise. The miracle for Simeon, Anna, and for us is in the showing up.

So, my friends. My message to you is, **keep showing up**. Show up on Christmas Eve, hold a lit candle in the darkness and dare to sing *Silent Night* as an act of resistance and hope. Keep showing up at the Eucharist where we join in Christ's continuing offering of himself, and us, and all of creation, to God in a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Keep showing in those places where cruelty and hate attempt to thwart the human spirit of love and creativity. Keep showing up in the temple of your lives, lifting up the weak and vulnerable, and

praising God. And when your journey ends sing with Simeon:

Lord, now you let your servant go in peace. Your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen the salvation which You have prepared in the sight of every people. A light to reveal You to the nations and the glory of Your people Israel. Amen.



SAINT MARK'S
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