

# A Sight For Sore Eyes

The End of the Year sermon presented by The Rev. Philip A. Rodgers presented Sunday, December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017  
at Trinity United Church in Malton, related to Luke 2:22-40

Text For The Sermon: *"Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against,"<sup>35</sup> so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."* — Luke 2: 34

For you, as for many, has it come to echoing the words of Hank Ketchum's perennial one-frame illustration of Dennis the Menace on Christmas Morning, where Dennis is seated in a pile of opened gifts and asks, "Is this all?" Is this all Christmas is — a huge family time with the opened gifts for which the children play with the toys on Christmas Day, and the boxes in which they come the day after Christmas?

Only certainly eyes see Christ during and after Christmas. For old Simeon it was the best time of his life. This was a special time for him. God had revealed to him what he was waiting for. No, Simeon helps us to know that this is not all. This moment is what Simeon had waited for, prayed for, and looked for guided by the Holy Spirit. For Simeon this was all he needed. According to him, it was a sight for sore eyes long awaited: he could die now. Imagine hearing those certain words of Simeon, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation..." Certain words cued up by certain eyes — certain eyes that had finally seen what God had sent — not unlike the Magi who had seen the baby Jesus and gone home another way. Certain eyes that suggest that God is still speaking, God is still with us, God is still responding to human needs and human cries and the groans of this world. For Simeon, those eyes on that boy Jesus were consolation for Israel, while for Anna Jesus was the redemption of Israel, a sight for consolation for centuries of captivity, exile, and silent tears.

But not all are gifted with certain eyes. Not all are excited about the sight for certain eyes. Experiences cloud expectations! The way life has unfolded for us can indeed cloud our expectations. It is not easy for those whose experience has been marked with pain to discern healing; it is not easy for those whose history has been one lived in alienation to even imagine participation. It is not easy for one who has only known sadness to realize joy; it is not easy for those used to playing on an unlevel playing field of what it means to be existentially challenged to realize what it means to be free. Presently, our times are in need of consolation and redemption. We too are jaded by these uncertain times, times marked by an uncertain economy, times marked by an insecure political reality that is Donald Trump, times marked by high gas prices, times of global warming, times marked by a chronic war in The Middle East. How can you know peace when there seems to be no peace?

An American College football team had five losing seasons in a row – and lost every game. Well, it was this sixth season that they finally won their first game, and there was everything but celebration going on and when interviewed by a reporter who said, "Well, aren't you glad, aren't you happy by what has happened?" One player said, "Well, no, we are not: how are we supposed to feel when losing has become the culture of this team?" Such would be the words of those who are unaccustomed to celebration, who have only known uncertainty. The message is not that we look through a glass dimly but that light can become rare when we have only known darkness. Yet we see that sight is possible for certain eyes. Certain eyes, sore eyes that have the capacity to believe God's "yes" in the midst of the world's "no".

But is this all? What does this text offer to teach us today? After all of the celebration of Christmas as we have come to know it, is this a reminder of how Christmas should be known? Have we lost the desire to believe and look for that which we believe? Well, certain sore eyes have a clarity of God's

vision. Certain eyes know what God is doing in the midst of what the world is doing. Secondly, sore eyes have a certainty of God's promise. Certain eyes know that whatever God has promised God will deliver. It takes faith to know a holy blessing when you see it. It is a joy of celebrating God's goodness in the midst of life's grittiness.

Past wounds can blur the lenses through which we look. Yet Luke is deliberate in mentioning to us that Simeon's and Anna's devout faith, guidance by the Holy Spirit, allow us a bit of seasoning for this season. The boy Jesus was a powerful and expected sight for certain eyes, sore eyes, born of devout and unwavering faith.

The name Harriet Tubman is not well known to us in Canada but she was an American abolitionist, humanitarian, and an armed scout and spy for the United States Army during the American Civil War. Born into slavery, Tubman escaped and subsequently made some thirteen missions to rescue approximately seventy enslaved people, family and friends, using the network of houses known as the Underground Railroad. It has been said that Harriet Tubman was known to wait in train stations without the aid of train schedules or knowing when the train was coming. When asked why she would do that, she simply said because she knew the train was coming.

In an age of GPS, in an age of DNA's and all information load, this may sound strange, but what does it mean to wait without a schedule but to be certain that the train is coming? Could it be that Tubman knew that the station was the place to be when waiting for coming trains? Might it have been that Tubman saw that the tracks had already been laid outside the station for traveling beyond where her stationed eyes could see?

Likewise, Simeon and Anna were stationed in the very place, the temple, where certain eyes were able to see and recognize the boy Jesus for who he was and is--the Messiah! We know that not all would or could see Jesus as the Messiah. Experience clouds expectation. Do you hear what they heard, see what they saw?

Music historians tell us that George Frideric Handel was so impacted by what he saw in the Bible that he penned the Messiah and The Hallelujah Chorus, the complete 260-page oratorio, in just 24 days, and without getting much sleep or even eating much food. When his assistants brought him his meals, they were often left uneaten. His servants would often find him in tears as he composed. When he completed "The Hallelujah Chorus," he reportedly told his servant, "I think I did see all Heaven before me, and the great God Himself seated on His throne, with His company of angels."

Simeon and Anna saw something like that as well. They give us an aftertaste of affirmation. They answer Dennis' question, "Is this all?" Of all of the things that promise to be all, Jesus is all of God's Word made flesh among us. All we will ever need of God's eternal and steadfast love. A sight for sore eyes! Amen.