

I want us to think for a few moments about Simeon and Anna.

What was distinctive about them?

- They were old.
- They were devout.
- They were in the Temple all the time.
- They had a prophetic gift to see what was happening spiritually in the worldly events of the day.
- They probably prayed all the time for God's promises to come true, soon.

I wonder whether, if people like them had not prayed, daily, for the salvation of Jerusalem, for the coming of the messiah; whether the birth of Jesus might have been delayed many years?

We know God answers prayers. So if we do not pray, does he withhold his answers? I think, yes.

What are we looking forward to year by year?
Do we pray fervently, all the time?
If we prayed more, would God be able to act faster?
God does wait for human permission to act in human affairs.

For Zion's sake,
I will not keep silent

1st of
Christmas

Luke 2.22-40
Isaiah 61.10—62.3

This is something Frances and I have had on our hearts for a long time. The need for commitment shown in fervent frequent prayer for the things of God's Kingdom to come to be - here in this part of God's world.

We each need to be bringing to God, regularly, these bigger issues - kingdom issues - discerning prophetically what is happening in the heavenly realms and adding our intercession to that process doing battle for the Kingdom of God so it can come here and now.

Just one of the things on our hearts; and it is triggered by the story of these two old saints, Simeon and Anna, in Luke 2.

And then Isaiah 61.

We had the earlier part of the chapter recently
*The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.*

and

*They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the LORD
for the display of his splendour.*

Remember?

And now it continues

I delight greatly in the LORD;

my soul rejoices in my God.

*For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness.*

Beautiful words, no doubt favourites of Anna and Simeon because they speak of that anointed servant of the Lord.

who is Jesus,

but who also is the whole people of God.

And then the prophet continues; 62. 1

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,

for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,

till her righteousness shines out like the dawn,

her salvation like a blazing torch.

Whether it is God who cannot keep quiet,

or the Prophet Isaiah,

it is certainly needs to be us too!

If we have glimpsed this vision

this fulfilling of the Kingdom

when righteousness and salvation

instead of being something for a few

becomes the blaze of God's glory over all the earth.

Then we too will want to tell it to the world.

God has promised this ... It will be so ...

if you wish, you can make it come sooner.

All it takes for God's Kingdom to come

is for individuals to submit, one by one, to God's Kingship.

You cannot change the world.
But you can change you.

And you can tell your friend to get on board too.
And then go find two more friends.
And so on ...

Then look. The world changes.

When the prophets said
"God's saviour will be born."
Was that the end of the story?

When Gabriel said,
"Mary, you will bear a child"
Was that the end of the story?

When the angel said,
"Now God's glory has come to earth"
Was that the end of the story?

so we could go on
The Shepherds, the Wise men, Simeon and Anna
Was that the end of the story?

No.

Even Easter, and the Ascension, and Pentecost
are not the end of the story.

We are the end of the story
as we tell it, and people turn.

Christmas must continue
every day
in every one of God's people,
big and small, young and old.

Not just for this week.

The Shepherds went home.

*They spread the word
concerning what had been told them about this child.*

Anna,

*spoke about the child
to all who were looking forward
to the redemption of Jerusalem.*

Isaiah,

*For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet.*

Christmas must not stop here.

Let me read to you
one of the Christmas Cards I received this year.
It is the loveliest Christmas card I have ever seen.

It doesn't say "Happy Christmas",
or "Merry Christmas", or "Season's Greetings"
It just says this:

*When the song of the angels
is stilled*

*When the star in the sky
is gone*

*When the kings and princes
are home*

*When the shepherds
are back with their flocks*

The work of Christmas begins:

*to find the lost
to heal the broken
to feed the hungry
to release the prisoner
to rebuild the nations
to bring peace among people
to make music in the heart.*

[Words by Howard Thurman (1899 - 1931)
American black Baptist minister,
spiritual advisor to Martin Luther King.]

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Setting the Scene

How many people
got a 2012 diary or a calendar for Christmas?

Have you been busy going through the old one,
and copying things into the new one?

Some things are the same, and some are different?

Another question -
who knows all the trains in Thomas the Tank engine?
Do you know "Mighty Mac"?
What was special about him?
He had two engines in one - facing both ways?
(You can watch it on U-tube if you Google "Mighty Mac")

Do you think having an engine facing both ways
was true - or made up?

It was true - they used them on the ffestioniog railway
see picture!. (Double Fairlies)

Now what is the link
with calendars and diaries
with Mighty Mac
and the bible reading?

Facing both ways - looking back and looking ahead

Simeon and Anna were both very old
and they often looked back
not just on their own memories
but way back in the scripture to the old prophecies.

But some of these ancient prophecies - looked forward -
one day in the future - something special -
someone special - is going to arrive.

That day in the Temple, they both knew
that Jesus was - the one promised in the past
but he was actually the person to change the future.

Look back - look forward
some things are the same - some are different.

That day - they knew -
not just for them but for the whole world
that the future was going to be different
because Jesus was here.

We could think of lots of things that are different
because of Jesus.

Simeon said - now he can die in peace
because God's light has come into the world.

Anna said - that Jesus was going to bring redemption
He was the going to save the world.

Mary and Joseph didn't know what to think.
But they remembered - and watched - as Jesus grew up.

They were amazed that day -
and they were to be even more amazed in the years to come.

I wonder what difference Jesus has made to you.

What things do you do now, because of Jesus.

What people do you know now, because of Jesus.

What do we experience, and enjoy, because of Jesus.

How do you change things for others, because of Jesus.

And is there some way, in 2012
that the difference Jesus makes
could be even more so than 2011?

Are there decisions you could make
that would make looking forward
more about Jesus than looking back?

Think about it this week.

More later.

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Birthdays and presentations

Testimony time, Collection.