

December 31, 2017
First Sunday After Christmas

“Trusting Resurrection”

Luke 2:22-40

In the book of Ecclesiastes it is written, “There is nothing new under the sun.” This is true. The same sins and temptations have been around since Adam and Eve. People ask me sometimes if I think the state of humanity is getting worse and more depraved. I guess it is, just because we have more people, thus more sinners, thus sinning on a greater scale. But I also think it’s all the same old sin, just with better media coverage.

But I also think Satan, like any good marketer, is always looking for new and better ways to package and present his product. And one of the greatest lies he tries to sell mankind is the one that this world and the life you live in it is the most important, greatest good and highest priority that there is for you in the universe.

Simeon wasn’t buying. The Christ child is brought into the temple and He rejoices. *“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 revelations to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”*

I ask you, what did Simeon see according to the world? Nothing. A baby. A baby in a city filled with babies. There may have been a dozen other baby boys brought into the temple that very day for the exact same ceremony as little Jesus. All that Simeon had was God’s promise...and with that he is totally good with dying...because God says it’s okay.

This is the simple truth of the Gospel; God saves you from death. And it’s not a new message. This sacrifice Joseph and Mary do is for redemption of the first-born child—a reminder of how the first born of the Jews were saved from death during the Passover event back when they were slaves in Egypt. The promise of Messiah immediately after Adam and Eve’s fall into sin was because they had eaten the forbidden fruit and now, as promised, they would surely die. The reason we celebrate the Christmas birth of Jesus is because He arrived to defeat death forever.

St. Paul clearly explains how Holy Baptism joins us to Christ’s death and to His resurrection to eternal life. Jesus Christ Himself promises in the context of a human death, that of Lazarus, *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”* Christians have no need to fear death.

Yet here is where I think Satan has brought some new packaging into our 21st century context. In centuries past it may have been easier to hold this great gift as most precious. Death was always near and looming. Little Timmy next door had a fever in the morning, by sundown he was dead. Joe across the street goes to bed with an upset stomach, by morning convulsions and by noon he has passed. Minor injuries led to infection and death. Plagues devastated entire regions and pillaging armies arrived without warning.

But today, today we have science. Today we have advanced medicines, incredible surgical procedures, transplants and implants. Much of the stuff that simply killed people without warning in the past now is regularly diagnosed, treated and cured. Even the things we can’t cure can usually be managed and life extended.

On top of this we have hospitals, nursing homes and care facilities. The dying usually aren’t next door or in the next room. Yes, death comes once in a while, but often it is expected

and managed, and followed with a proper wake and funeral. It's not jumping up and getting in our face day after day.

Let me pause here really quick and say I praise God for the doctors and all the medical professionals, the technology and medicines that treat our ills. These are truly blessings from God for our good.

But here's my point, with so much wonderful stuff to treat our ills and extend our lives comes a temptation that is nothing new under the sun, but repackaged in 21st century tech—the temptation to trust man rather than God.

Psalm 20, verse seven says, *“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.”*

Chariots and horses looked strong to ancient Israel, but such things could not save that nation from defeat and death. God saved them from defeat and death on a regular basis and ultimately saves the whole world from defeat and death by the death and resurrection of His Son.

Today science and medicine seem to be incredibly wondrous and powerful tools that can save us from suffering and death...but they too will ultimately fail. These are useful blessings, yes. But they cannot save us from death. And if we put our trust in such things and not in God, we can have no peace, because we know they ultimately fail.

The promises of God have never and will never fail. This is what Simeon knew and why he could look to God and say, *“Now you are letting your servant depart in peace.”* He only had a baby, but the promise of God was that this baby was the anointed one, the Christ, who was God's salvation that saved the faithful from death. That was good enough for Simeon.

Let the promise be good enough for you also, because you have a whole lot more than just a baby! You know exactly what this Christ has accomplished. He has done death and conquered it! You have the same promise and the rest of the story! You have the word of the witnesses! You have the historical resurrection of Christ!

And you have even more! You have the promise included in Holy Baptism—the fullness of salvation done to you in the Word and the water once of for all. You have the Eucharist, the promise accomplished in the very body and blood of Christ again and again to forgive your sins and strengthen you for today's walk through the valley or the shadow of death, in which you can fear no evil, for the rod and thy staff of the Good Shepherd who defeated death comforts you.

You have the promise, the Word, the Word made flesh, to live in peace and depart in peace.

So the message today is simple; trust not in horses, chariots, science, medicine, money, family, monuments, legacies or anything else that pretends to give you a longer life in this world. Such things may extend your breaths, maybe extend the memory of you...but you're still going to die. Trust in the promises of God in Christ. Only in Him can you depart in peace. Only baptized into His death and resurrection can you know for sure that on the day you die, with Jesus you don't.

Amen.