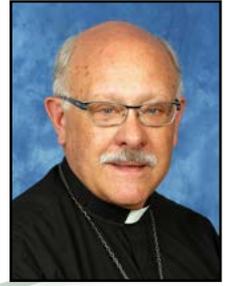




Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

First Sunday of Christmas

December 31, 2017

Mission Forward

Luke 2:25-40

Even though the Christmas sales are a week old; with the Valentine's Day retail in its place, we live still in the afterglow of the celebration of the birth of Jesus.

The questions of Christmas Eve sermons still long for answers from the people of God: 1) So what does it mean that God believes in us? 2) So what does it mean to Believe in Jesus? And how do the ongoing answers guide us to be discipleFit in these times?

Our Gospel sets the tone for us to be MISSION FORWARD as a congregation.

Here is the setting of the Gospel just read: Jesus was circumcised. Joseph and Mary were observant with her Purification, 40 days after Jesus' birth, led them to the Levitical ritual of Presentation. A rite which set the first born son as dedicated to YAHWEH, the LORD. So, they brought Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem. [Leviticus 12]

At Temple, two witnesses, and their faithful actions mark a tipping point in response to the birth of this child named "Jesus."

Luke seems to emphasize the dual "bookends" to the birth story: at the one side Zechariah (priest at Temple) and Elizabeth (surprised beyond words that, at her age, she would become the mother to John known as Baptist) --- then, Joseph and Mary (to whom God gave Elizabeth as mentor and friend) --- and on the other side, Simeon ("righteous and devout"/led by the Holy Spirit) and Anna ("a prophet" / 84 year old widow who never left the Temple / at worship day and night!)

Luke records for us the great transition from the first promise to the fulfillment of that promise in Jesus, presented at Temple, and launched into the mission that God had planned from the beginning of time.

It is the last day of 2017, Common Era, the Year of our Lord. And I am often amazed that thousands of years later; in a culture often driven by a secular agenda; that we are here and listening to the account of two very senior citizens in a Temple that no longer exists. It just seems so "old fashioned."

I believe that our mission forward movement begins in that story. Here are the four points (Surprise!)

1. Like each of us, in the Time of Advent now passed, they WAITED. Not just hanging around the Temple to see what's new, but present in confident trust, intense hope that God had/has a plan for each of them and for all people.

Catch the language... "righteous and devout in prayerful expectancy of help for Israel." And Anna? "Never left the temple...worship with fasting and prayer NIGHT AND DAY."

Mission Forward is rooted in waiting to be led, seeking and trusting that we are called to move as we are not pushed, but prayerfully guided into the new times that are set before us in life, in mission.

2. For each of them, as for us, worship is the foundation for life. It is not always as individuals we find our paths, but in partnership with one another in Christ. Can we dare to believe that Simeon and Anna knew each other well? Might they have shared their hopes and fears in all their years, knowing that the day would come when the Holy Spirit would nudge and direct them to know that their waiting and worship were not in vain.

Mission Forward is found empowered in worship and fellowship as we hear the Word, share the Meal, trust and know that the peace we long for me found not in some product, but in the provision God makes for us in the place where the Holy Spirit speaks most clearly! Here in this place! Becoming discipleFit involves a shared commitment to be the faith witnesses of what we know to be true in Christ. All of this sparked with the fire of koinonia, together life.

Each of them responded to the guidance of the Spirit and they saw Jesus clearly as a child who was the end of their wait and they responded in presence and song.

Simeon received Jesus, held him in his arms and sang what we know as The Nunc Dimittis. "God, release your servant...I have seen your salvation which is open to everyone...a revealing light for all."

Mary and Joseph speechless as he blesses them with the word that through suffering will come the blessing for all...even Lutherans!

Anna, as Simeon sings, shows up and sings too in praise of God and witnesses to everyone who longs for the freedom, the salvation which Jesus would bring.

Mission Forward is found in our witness in the world that we have seen and been with Jesus. That happens every time we set foot on earth.

In the season of Advent our love and witness was found in over-giving to every outreach opportunity---and in providing clear witness through our trio and hosting handbells as a gift to the community with over 400 in this place.

3. They all went on their way, God's way, with Jesus, for the sake of the world.

We never know what became of Simeon or Anna; or Zachariah and Elizabeth; know not further news of Joseph, but we know that Mary was at Calvary, with the fellowship of the Risen Christ at Pentecost, and likely lived the rest of her days in Ephesus.

Mission Forward means we go on our way and out of our way rejoicing in what we have seen, heard, experienced with one another in this time of Advent-Christmas.

Perhaps, like Jesus, growing strong, faithful and wise, knowing that God's favor rests upon us in Christ.

Joseph and Mary were faithfully observant, training their children in the way of the LORD. Jesus with the grace of God's favor upon him.

Luke next records his appearance at the Temple, a 12-year-old keeping Passover, lost and teaching the elders at the Temple.

Once found, {Imagine. Once lost and found, even Jesus!} and back to Nazareth where He "lived obediently with them. Mary held all these things in her heart as Jesus matured, growing up in both body and spirit, blessed by both God and people."

Next to be seen, at the Jordan, to be baptized by John, His cousin, son of Zachariah and Elizabeth. It would seem that what comes around, comes around. God's plan secure for the life of the world.

Each of us are today God's beloved sons and daughters. Called to MISSION FORWARD in all of the days that God has left for us...one step at a time, like Simeon and Anna of old.

✠ In Jesus' name, let it be. Happy 2018, a year of growth in becoming discipleFIit. (January 7 is the Baptism of Our Lord.)