

Luke 2:25-33

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,  
according to your word;  
for 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 the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about Jesus.

Deep within me, way down in the sub-basement, there is a load-bearing wall holding up much of my life. It is the knowledge that moments after I was born, I was held in the arms of an old man who loved me, and who was grateful to be alive.

On May 9, 1985, one month before this memory, my Dad had gall bladder surgery and then wouldn't stop bleeding. His colleague came into his hospital room and Eric saw on his face something that reminded him of a book he read in medical school with a chapter entitled "The doctor feareth." The doctor was afraid and so Dad was afraid. And yet, my brother John remembers him saying before they took him back in to

the operating room that he was ok, that he was at peace, and that he hoped to hold the baby growing inside my Mom and watch it grow up, but even if that would be too much to ask, he was at peace. The next morning, May 10, 1985 my mother woke up to a call that Dad had made it through the night.

In my Dad's shirt pocket when he died was one of Geoffrey Berwind's storytelling prompt sheets that he had filled out. It tells the story of him coming to the Wayne church in 1997 because he had a mass on his liver and there weren't any good options. He wanted to have his funeral here even though he wasn't a member and he couldn't see a way forward to making that happen. So my Mom met with one of the pastors, told her the predicament, and she said it would be fine and they could work something out. Dad wrote on this worksheet that he learned in that instance that Wayne was his new community of faith and that here was just another example of God's continued faithfulness to him, the faithfulness that he could see clearly beginning May 9, 1985.

The primary, maybe even only, mode with which my father and I interacted was gratitude. We both knew he almost died a month before I was born and we were just grateful to know each other because we almost didn't. But our respective gratitudes were not identical. The gratitude he felt was different. It wasn't just, "Isn't this kid great?" because of course there were plenty of times when I wasn't. It was gratitude pulled from a deeper well, a source of gratitude utterly removed from external circumstances.

I know now this gratitude came from the knowledge that settled upon

him that night when he was at death's door: That his eyes had seen God's salvation, prepared in the presence of all peoples. Like Simeon, this man who had spent his life waiting on the Lord, righteous and devout, my Dad had seen everything he needed to see to be dismissed in peace. And the rest was just gravy.

There is so much about the story of Simeon that reminds me of my Dad. Of course, they're both old men.

But beyond their advanced age, they looked forward to what God was doing in the world. The text tells us Simeon looked forward to the consolation of Israel, the spirit told him to go down to the temple to see the Messiah and so he did. Few would do that and the ones who would wouldn't look upon a baby and say, "There's that Messiah." But here was Simeon, paying attention to what God was doing enough to see it and to scoop it up in his arms and sing.

Simeon had put himself in the path of God enough to see that God was up to something unexpected. Likewise my Dad studied and prayed and read scripture and looked upon the world expectantly trusting that God would show up. He put himself in the path of God's actions in the world.

And of course, this is an incredibly risky thing to do because encountering God means changing your life. Encountering God means your life isn't yours anymore. It means something has to change. It means you're governed by something bigger than yourself and maybe you knew that in the abstract before, now, having encountered God you know it for certain and have no choice but to act accordingly.

Putting yourself in the path of God is a truly revolutionary and

courageous act.

When the alarm sounds that an avalanche of wisdom is coming down the mountain, most of us run the other way. But Simeon and my Dad strap on their skis.

On the freeway with four lanes headed for justice and four lanes heading for mercy, most of us cross on the pedestrian overpass but Simeon and my Dad are daring each other to run across, playing frogger.

When the Weather Channel's local on the 8's shows a love storm with a bright band of red sweeping into town, most folks hole up inside but Simeon and my Dad are out there flying a kite.

What I'm trying to get at here is that through study, prayer, scripture, and actions, my Dad desired an encounter with God, even knowing full well that it would change him. The story of his life is the story of a continual journey from relative comfort to uncertainty, of hearing the Spirit tell him to go to the Temple, "you will see something there" and then doing it, not knowing what he would find except God's faithfulness.

Leaving behind the comfort of a family practice to become an anesthesia resident, with the much lower salary and status. Leaving behind the comfort of Canada, his home and native land, to immigrate to a strange new country with bizarre customs. Traveling to Haiti and Hong Kong as a medical missionary. Or leaving the church of his upbringing to become Presbyterian, which he referred to as the journey from Plymouth to Geneva.

I've had a lot of conversations over the past few days with a lot of wonderful people, all telling me how sorry they are and what a good

man my Dad was. And people say, "If there's anything I can do, just say so." So since you're all here, let me take you up on that.

First of all, there is a special place in the heart of God for widows, orphans, and strangers. Let there be a special place in yours, as well. Look out for my Mom.

Second, live your life in the way of Simeon, in the way of my Dad. Put yourself in the path of God. If there are two roads to Damascus and one means getting blinded by the light of God and having to uproot your life forever and the other just gets you to Damascus, take the first one. If you look out over the valley below and see one path with a band of disciples ready to ambush you into a life of service to the living God and the other just gets you safely into town, take the first one!

When the massive rock of God is rolling down the hill like in Indiana Jones, don't peel off, let yourself get squished!

Listen to the spirit of the Lord when it tells you to go to the temple. Look for the consolation of the world. Never stop learning things. Listen more than you talk. Form your words carefully. Don't talk bad about other people, even when they talk bad about you.

Or to put it a particularly Christian way, bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Jesus Christ dismisses all of us in peace. We have all seen our salvation, prepared in the presence of all peoples. All of this, family, church, pets, food, little babies - all of this is just gravy! It's all the cherry on top of a resurrection sundae. Nothing magical happened in my Dad's spirit on May 9, 1985, it wasn't some gnostic secret that only he can understand, it was just when he noticed and felt the peace that passes all understanding, the peace with

which we are all dismissed.

The reason that old man was able to hold me that way was because he knew he was being held as well. He held me in his arms and he knew he was in God's arms. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus means that you're in God's arms, nothing can change that, so throw yourself in the path of the living God. We have seen our salvation, a light of revelation. We, like my Dad, are dismissed in peace.

In the name of the father, the son, and the holy ghost. Amen.