

Second Reformed Church, Pella, Iowa
Steve & Sophie Mathonnet-VanderWell, preaching
Luke 2:22-40

January 1, 2012

The Deep Roots of a Tender Shoot (A dialog of Simeon and Anna)

Simeon? Simeon? Is that you?

Yes, Anna—it's me. I'm *still* here.

It's just that I hadn't seen you in a few days. I thought maybe you were... Well, you know. I'm sorry. Didn't mean to send you off before you're gone. But I did hear your words, "Lord, let your servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation!" It echoed through the whole temple.

No need to apologize, Anna. I too wonder how much longer I have. The Lord had promised me that I would not die until I saw the Messiah. That promise has been fulfilled. I figure I'm sort of on borrowed time now... Was I really so loud the other day

I certainly heard you. I suppose many others did too.

Ah—but to see and hold the Messiah. After a lifetime of waiting. I guess I'm not surprised that I was shouting! But if I was so loud, help me out here. Do you remember what I said? I've been feeling rather badly. I think I was too blunt, too pointed with that young mother. She was so young. So excited. So naïve.

Simeon, every mother knows her children will bring some pain and disappointment. She has to know that.

Yes, but I said more than that. I said something about her child causing the rise and the fall of many, that he would face bitter opposition. And then I definitely remember saying to her "A sword will pierce *your soul too*." I've felt pretty guilty about that. I think I saw tears in her eyes.

We're prophets. We don't always like what we have to say, but it comes with the territory. That young mother now knows in part. And the Lord will strengthen her when the worst comes.

You are right. You are wise, Anna. Those words just tumbled out of me that day. The day I've been waiting for almost my whole life, and yet almost nothing went as I had envisioned it.

What do you mean?

Anna—be honest. Is this the way you pictured it, the coming of the Messiah? The mother so young. The father, obviously well-meaning, but completely overwhelmed. They're so ordinary, so unlike what I was expecting. And they're from Galilee! Galilee, of all places.

You know Simeon I must confess I share your concerns. How can the Messiah arise from that family? Did you notice they were a two-pigeon family? They couldn't even afford a sheep for the birth of their first son. What does that tell you about their finances? A baby from a family like that is the one who will set us free? I'll confess it is not at all the way I pictured it. Tell me—are you worried, Simeon? Could it have been a mistake? Do you think that child wasn't truly the Messiah.

There's no doubt. Sure, I've second-guessed myself, but I can't deny what happened that day. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, I know what I experienced that day. When the family walked into the temple, the Holy Spirit spoke so clearly to me, "Here is the Messiah. This is the long-awaited child!" I've never been more certain of anything in my life. When I held that little boy, it was like new life was surging through my tired old body. The sense of joy, of completion, of conclusion. It was indescribable.

That's comforting, Simeon. Look at us. All these years of prayer and fasting and waiting and yet now *we* have doubts. If any anyone should know better it should be us. God so rarely works in the way we expect. The ways of the Lord are different from the ways we think best. God will accomplish all things in God's own way. How can we forget that?

Yes, but here I still am. The Lord said I would live to see the Messiah—and well, I haven't died yet. The bright glow of that day is already fading. A few days have passed now and everything just seems the same. *Nothing has changed.* Look around here, Anna, the temple, all of Jerusalem. Is there any evidence that the Messiah is among us.

What would you have them do? What sort of changes were you hoping for?

I don't know. I'm sounding crazy and confused. But wouldn't you just think the fact that the Messiah is born, that this would change something?

Yes, it often feels like we're always waiting for God. Years of waiting for the Messiah to come—actually centuries if you think about it. And now, apparently, the Messiah has come and we still must wait. Waiting, waiting, waiting. That little boy has to learn to walk and talk. Years of going to synagogue in his village, meals around the family table, perhaps being apprenticed by his father. Who knows how long before the world will really see that the Messiah is here. Waiting, and waiting. Wait some more for God. *How long* must we wait?

Still, Anna, just hearing you talk lifts my spirit, strengthens my resolve. Just think of it—the Messiah *is* here. The Messiah is among us. That is an undeniable fact. The world may not yet know or see or understand. He may just be a helpless little babe. But *the Messiah is here.* Whether we realize it or not, everything has been already changed. God has bared his mighty arm and reached into the world. Our people will be renewed. The course of history, the course of universe has been changed.

There is a tender shoot growing from our deep and ancient roots. And it will blossom in God's good time.

Yes. Yes. Praise the Lord God of Israel, yes. Here we are in old age talking like impetuous fools. You and I have come to this temple day after day for decades now. We, more than anyone else, should know that the way of our God is about steady faithfulness, day-to-day discipleship, living with God in the everyday patterns of life. But now we seem to think the ways of God are immediate. It is as if we are denying our life long commitments. Look, even that young family is off to a good start—fulfilling their obligation and bringing their young child to the temple. Thank you, Anna, for reminding me of what I have spent my whole life living. Blessed be the God, the creator and ruler of the universe. And blessed be the Messiah—God with us—even now.

You're welcome, Simeon. Your friendship and faithfulness have been such gifts to me all these years. And now that God has kept his promise to you, do you think about how much longer you have?

My time is up. My role is complete. The torch has been passed. It is time for me to step back, to let go and trust the future to God. Exactly how much time I have left—well, I can't be concerned. Each day that I have I will do as I have always done, coming to this temple to worship. The Lord has kept his vow to me and I will keep my vow to the Lord.

You are a wise man—righteous and devout. God is indeed doing something new. Our work is done. Our time is past. Still we are signs that hope is sustained by deep roots, that steadfastness is never ignored by God. Simeon—the Lord bless and keep you. And perhaps, I'll see you here again tomorrow.