

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota

Luke 2:22-40
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
 February 2, 2014

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

Kids, there was a story in the Brainerd paper recently about somebody's grandma dying and leaving some little note cards with a whole string of letters written on them. When this grandma, Dorothy Holm, was near death, she lost her ability to talk. All she could do was write a little. So she wrote down these rows of letters. Then she died. The letters didn't spell any words. They didn't make any sense. Her grandkids couldn't figure out what kind of a message she had left behind for them. Then one of them put the letters out on the internet and asked if anyone could figure out what they meant.

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Before long, someone did figure it out. Grandma Holm had been writing the first letter in each of the words of The Lord's Prayer. She must have been trying to tell her kids to have faith in God. She must have been telling them that she was going to be okay after she died because she would be going to live with God in heaven.

Do you kids know The Lord's Prayer? Remember, it starts out, "**Our Father who art in heaven.**" Do you know "**Now I lay me down to sleep?**" Do you know "**Come Lord Jesus, be our guest?**" Who taught you to pray? Have your grandma and grandpa told you about Jesus? Have they read Bible stories to you? Do they pray with you at bedtime or at mealtime when you stay at their house? I guess Grandma Holm wanted to be sure that her kids knew that she loved Jesus. I guess she wanted to be sure that they loved Jesus too. I guess she wanted them to know how much God loves them!

Do you love Jesus? Do your Grandma and Grandpa love Jesus? Does your church family here at First Lutheran love Jesus? Have you ever heard anyone here say that they love Jesus? Do we dare say that together? "**I love Jesus.**" **And Jesus loves us!** Thanks be to God. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

Mary and Joseph, new, young parents brought their first baby, Jesus, to be circumcised. You know. It started out as an unplanned pregnancy. It almost split the couple up. But somehow, with God's intervention and help, they stuck together. Now, a few months later, they were committing their child to God. They were doing what their faith in God required. Young

parents do that to this very day. Sounds like baptism. Sounds like worship. Sounds like the prayer, fellowship and service that you are a part of here today. The struggle that infant Jesus' family experienced is very familiar to the young families of our own day as well. It's hard to raise kids. Just like Mary and Joseph, I think that the young families who occupy these pews at First Lutheran are also committing their kids, their families into God's care.

So, Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the Jewish place of worship and offered up the smallest sacrifice possible. They probably barely had two coins to rub together. Yet they offered what they could in thanksgiving and praise to the God who had given them Jesus. Can you imagine being a sixteen year old mother and wife? Can you imagine being poor and having to raise God's Son, Jesus? Can you imagine the questions, doubts and fears that must have haunted their commitment to help Jesus to grow and prosper in their world? It's hard to raise any child. I can't imagine trying to raise God's child.

So, Mary and Joseph are at the temple with Jesus. Then two somewhat strange, old characters appear. Both Anna and Simeon spent a lot of their time at God's house. This day, they showed up just as Mary and Joseph were about to set out on the perilous journey of raising Jesus. This young couple had been chosen to raise God's own Son in this often broken and troubling world. And these two old people came and gave a hopeful word to this young couple who were in a tough spot. **"This little baby, Jesus is truly God's Son come to save us all!"**

That's how God still works to this very day. God often moves through the thoughts, words and actions of the more mature believers who surround and undergird our faith family. Has some older believer been there to encourage you at some time or another?

God had had this work in mind for a long time. Simeon and Anna had both heard the promise that God would send a Messiah to save God's people. Both had clung to that promise for many years, faithfully waiting for God's fulfillment. Simeon had been promised that he would see God's promise fulfilled before he died. I can't tell you the number of times older folks have asked why God hadn't taken them home to heaven yet. They were feeling useless and ready to move on to God's peaceful, joyful kingdom with new bodies and souls renewed. So here is Simeon, elderly, but still actively involved in God's mission to save our world. And Anna was very old too. Her life was no piece of cake, no rose garden. Anna had lost her husband at an early age, no mention of children. Then she had lived as a widow for most of her adult life. And she was a prophetess for God. She continued in her last years to faithfully speak God's hopeful word to the people around her.

God moves in and through the lives of very real, everyday people. God moves to bring about salvation/wholeness/healing through tired limbs, dimmed eyesight and weakened muscles. God moves to save God's people through wounded lives, broken relationships, scarce resources, doubts and fears. God so longs to save the children, all of the children, you and your children. If any good happens amongst the people of God, it is because God is moving among us to bring it about. And when God moves, amazing things can happen.

Anna and Simeon, both elderly people, were born to welcome the coming of God's presence in human form. They were born to point out Jesus who came bringing God's love, forgiveness, healing and empowerment into their lives and world. We are born for that too. Simeon and Anna were both busy doing the Lord's work until the day they died.

But Simeon and Anna never promised a rose garden. Simeon pointed to a future that held the threat of violence and death for this young family trying to raise God's own Son. Mary and Joseph, Simeon and Anna lived in a real world, very much in need of saving. So is our world.

Simeon was a righteous and devout man. He had been a faithful follower of God. He knew, at his advanced age, that his death was approaching. But, he also believed that God was going to show him the fulfillment of God's promise to send a savior into his world. Simeon had been longing for the salvation of his people. Did he have a certain young family in mind? Was he thinking about his own kids or grandkids? Did he have a friend who was down? Did he have a neighbor who had lost hope? Simeon was waiting and watching for God to act. And Simeon was there when God needed him. Are you watching for God in your own life? Do you have someone in mind that very much needs a visit from God's promised savior?

This is not about somebody else's family. One young buck in our family has a drug problem and is homeless. He hasn't spoken to his mom and dad for over two years. One young buck is father to his kids, her kids and their kid. One young buck works in North Dakota while trying to hold his family together back in Duluth. He doesn't think that there is a "God." But he is wondering if maybe he should give God another try. My wife and I are praying for all of these young men and their families. They all live far from us. So do your kids and grandkids. Who is going to be there in their community to offer a helping hand? Who is going to be there to make sure that they get the most loving, compassionate welcome and care possible if God's Holy Spirit manages to bring them inside some church someplace? What would happen if they came to our church? How would you welcome them?

I can't tell you the number of times that I've heard the old worn-out refrain, "**It's time for the younger people to do it. I did it when I was younger.**" But then I hear again and again from

the younger people, **“I am too crazy busy. I’m overwhelmed. I don’t even have time to come to worship let alone help with anything else.”** Pretty soon, there is nobody left who can help bring Jesus into the lives of our kids, into the lives of the people of this community. There are some many here in Aitkin that have never had the chance to truly experience the love, compassion and help of Jesus.

Old Simeon was brought into the temple by the Holy Spirit that day. Maybe that’s how you got here today yourself. The Holy Spirit coaxed, wooed, and drew you to this place of worship. God’s Holy Spirit, planted in our hearts at baptism, is speaking to us every day. God’s Spirit is calling us close to the source of life, Jesus. God’s Spirit longs to bring us to places of hope, delight and joy. God’s Spirit invites us, **“Come and see what I am doing in your world.”** Simeon and Anna were watching for what God might be doing even in their later years. Are you? Is God’s Spirit calling you to go someplace, to do something for God, for God’s people, for the children? How is God moving in your life and world right now? How would God like to move?

I have seen that ancient welcome and announcement of Jesus carried out by many, many of the older folks in our congregation. I have seen folks both in word and deed pointing to/affirming what Jesus has done in their lives. **Elaine Palthe** and her crew of retired members staff our nursery so that parents of little ones can have just a little time to sit quietly and listen for God’s life-giving word to be spoken to their hearts. **Pat Nyberg** has been showing and telling our elementary children about God’s love for something like 47 years as one of our Sunday school teachers. **Dale Beihoffer** faithfully dusts the pews and tidies up the sanctuary for our worship each week. **Gus Carlson** did his part by building safe and secure steps for our teens and their parents to enter the sound booth. **John Paulson** got down on his hands and knees and stuck his head under the floorboards of Maria Chapel in order to determine how to make it safe for renewed use by our parish. **Lewann Sotnack** is doing the puppet ministry. **Janet Peterson, Dea Kosbau** and **Bev Bailey** are cooking the Wednesday night meals. **Ardith Kane** and her quilting buddies make the beautiful quilts that we give to our seniors at graduation time. **Don and Sonja Hagestuen** have for years been our Bible camp representatives. **Chuck Petterson** does our worship projection slides. **Mary Peterson** and her crew do the altar preparations. Several of our older members help with **Tiny Tots**. **John and Sari Olson** lead our Soup Kitchen ministry. God didn’t just use Simeon and Anna to announce Jesus’ coming into our world. God is still using our older sisters and brothers in Christ to do that to this very day.

A dozen or more of our older members serve as one-on-one confirmation mentors to our teens. And they don’t just show up to attend class with the kids. They also worship with them. And I see several of them in attendance at our kids’ basketball, football, volleyball, wrestling... meets.

Our Friday Men's Breakfast crew hosted the Venison Supper last Sunday because the older guys in that group want to reach out to the younger men of this town. And a lot of them came, along with their sons. Our older guys want to offer their wisdom and support so that those young men have the best chance that they can to live happy and full lives, to be the best husbands and fathers that they can be. Even our nursing home residents are contributing to the life, healing and hope of our parish by praying for their own kids and grandkids and for the rest of our kids as well.

Bob and Darlene Munneke, supposedly long retired from parish ministry, have spent months, hours each day, trying to track down contact information for some 400 people who have in one way or another slipped off of our church membership and mailing lists. It is too easy to forget about people who have slipped away. Bob and Darlene don't want a single one to be lost. Neither does Jesus. Do you know somebody who could use a heartfelt invitation to come home to this faith family?

We started out today thinking about a young couple facing a huge challenge. Mary and Joseph were doing the best they could to bring Jesus into their own lives and into their world. Two elderly folks showed up to help and bless them along their way. First came Simeon and then came Anna. And together, and with the help of a lot of others, they made. Jesus lives in our lives and world too.

It is hard enough to raise any child. I can't imagine trying to raise God's child. Thanks to Jesus, now we know that **every child is God's child**. Could it ever be, that First Lutheran Church, Aitkin, Minnesota comes to be known as a place where young adults, young families, single parents, blended families, any kind of families or singles are always welcome, always wanted, always warmly received? Will we assist, encourage and help to empower such folks for healthy, joyful living? Will people be able to see that this is a community of God's loved, forgiven and constantly being made new people? Can we, like Anna and Simeon, bring help and blessing too?

Can our church be the kind of place that is always striving to fully live out God's mission to truly love and care for the neighbor and the creation in which we live?

That's what God wants to see. You and I have been reborn through the Holy Spirit who claimed us at baptism, who promised never to leave us, and who brought us together here today. The Holy Spirit invites you to see what God is doing in your life and world this very day. And God intends for you to be a part of it. What do you think? Are you too old? Are you too busy? No. Not in God's book. Thanks be to God. Amen.

