

SERMON

Nunawading and Waverley, 27-12-20

A Song of Hope

Luke 2:29–32

The reward is worth the wait. How often have we said that about things! Our very traditional courtship lasted five years and Denise and I were separated by the Tasman Sea, but our marriage was worth waiting for. Gaining a job or a degree were worth the years of preparation. Owning a home or building a career reveal to us that the reward of achievement is worth the sacrifice.

Waiting is not easy; giving up seems the better option. We wait for the renewal of the church and ask, **how long O Lord?** We wait for older children to return to Christ. Why not stop trying to evangelise and just accept the status quo? We wait for the woke age to pass, the identity politics to stop dominating the culture. We wait for a vaccine to be rolled out across the world and put a stop to infections and death. Why not throw caution to the wind as is happening in many nations?

We hope because we know there is a better future that is worth striving for. As Christians, we act with self-discipline and seek strength from our Lord because we have a song of hope on our hearts and lips. Hope lifts the spirits in the darkest moments. There were times when my wife and I fought for the health of our children and even had to ring for ambulances. In one congregation I served, the treasurer stole from the church and there was no money in the accounts. Hope brought us through. We could still sing because **faith, hope and love remain**, as the holy Scripture says. Hope even overcomes time itself because it is a sure trust in eternal life.

For us, hope is a powerful thing because it is built on God's promise of redemption. Like Simeon, we know that the Lord is faithful to his people. God's very integrity is bound up with everything he says so that he binds himself to us through his word.

Hope is a song in our hearts because we have seen eternal life and the forgiveness of sins. Simeon actually saw God's salvation: **for my eyes have seen your salvation**. Salvation and the Saviour came together in one little being, the eight-day old Jesus resting in Simeon's arms. Simeon saw this salvation with his very own eyes. We have the evidence in the gospels and the epistles, the prophets and the law. Their testimony has

opened our eyes, our eyes of faith. Perhaps we think this is a second best. Would it not be better to be an eye-witness, then our hope would be more certain? Let us not forget that we have experienced the presence of Jesus, not with eyes but within our hearts. Simeon's heart was moved but our hearts have been filled with the presence of Jesus, and that is a big difference. Hope, then, springs from our hearts.

When I want to give up, I am restored by the presence of the living Lord Jesus in me. When I see the denominations floundering and Christians weakening, I become bleak in my thinking. Then, all the years of Bible reading, absorbing Christian literature and listening to other Christians come back to me. The word that came to Simeon was confirmed for him and in the same way, the truth of the Holy Spirit within me, overcomes the bleak moments. Simeon spoke about God's salvation being **revealed to the nations**. Because it is God's salvation, something planned from eternity and not our doing at all, it has to come to us like light in the darkness. And that is how it is for you and me; hope is revealed; it comes from God and travels all the way to us and bursts into life and light within us.

Simeon waited, hoped and believed and, then, Mary and Joseph entered the temple precincts with Jesus. He looked at the child because God pointed him out. Then he said these famous words contained in our liturgy: **let your servant depart in peace according to your word**. Simeon could die in peace because his life had been fulfilled. I wonder if we see our life having a purpose with a goal to reach? Certainly, to be healthy, educated, find a job or raise a family are God's good purposes. Simeon reminds us, however, that there is an eternal purpose. Spreading salvation as far as you can is one of them. Being a witness in your life to Jesus Christ is another. Supporting God's people is certainly another as well as helping people in their various needs. To die, having fulfilled these purposes brings a tremendous peace and hope to us.

Finally, our bodies or ashes are placed in a grave in the hope of the resurrection. We wait there. We have hope when there is nothing left of us on this earth that Christ will return for us and raise us from the dead.

Let us have this song of hope when our world swings from wild jubilation in its own success and plunges into despair when everything goes wrong. Hope keeps us steady. We sing when there is darkness and we sing very softly when people are congratulating themselves. We sing of hope triumphing over the grave.