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Isaiah 61: 10 - 62: 3  
Galatians 4: 4-7  
Luke 2: 22-40

## SEEING SALVATION

If you look back at the law of the Lord, which we read so many times in this Luke passage, you'll have to go to Exodus 12 and Leviticus 13. There you'll find the prescription, the procedure, the right thing to do if you are seeking purification or if you want to observe the night when the angel passed over the homes of the Israelites, the Hebrews when they were being delivered out of Egypt. If you come to this ceremony of purification, you're supposed to bring a lamb. But we read that Mary and Joseph only had enough money, enough resources to take the alternative pauper's path, the poor man's offering. They bring two doves instead of a lamb.

This was supposed to be 40 days after the birth of Jesus. But that purification would have more to do with Mary than with Christ. Or, this could be the ceremony of that miraculous night. In that case, the offering was to be five shekels. You would come and offer the baby Jesus to the church—give him to the temple. And then you would redeem him with five shekels. A shekel today is a little less than four dollars, so a reasonable expectation, but again Luke says the offering they have is two doves.

So is this the dedication of Jesus to God's service and the purification of Jesus because of the distance between their house and Jerusalem? First-born children dedicated to the Lord—all children, because we are all first-born of Jesus Christ.

Is Luke combining two rituals, or are we to read something else in his message? It's odd that Jesus is present for either of these. It was not necessary to bring the child when you dedicated that child to the Lord and paid five shekels to redeem him back. But what we see that is most important is that both parents are there to receive the prophecies of Simeon and the interpretation by the prophet Anna, 84 years old and serving the Lord every day.

What is it you believe is happening in Luke? What's taking place? Is it what we do every Sunday in rehearsal for every day of our life? Do we wake in the morning first thing and ask God to cleanse us and purify our purposes? Include us, no matter our age or our circumstances, in the drama we call this community of faith. Is it the first thing we do before our cup of coffee, right after we hear the alarm clock, or, for many now, the cell phone ringing? Is our prayer "Dear Lord, cleanse me today. Use me to further your mission as part of this family and as part of Bush Hill Presbyterian Church"?

Are we doing what Mary and Joseph did next? Are we presenting ourselves and our families to God and then going through the ritual—the meaningful mystery of redeeming

everything we have at a fraction of its actual value? Think five shekels for the life of your child. We are all set apart for God's service, and Luke's message is telling each of us that our lives are to be wholly to the Lord—that moment in time, that lifelong experience of understanding ourselves as wholly to God, that's when we see our salvation. That's when, like Simian, we behold the child that is the fulfillment of all prophecy.

It's interesting that the second thing that Jesus elicits from Simian, the inspiration that comes because he has the Holy spirit resting upon him is something we need to hear also. The moment that we are tempted to trust our salvation to God, it will immediately come in conflict with our politics, whatever we believe.

The moment that we experience Jesus as our salvation, we will find that we are strangely different than the culture around us. We can no longer practice "might makes right." And I don't just mean on a global or military scale, I mean on a personal level. You see, the salvation which Jesus brings—the salvation which we receive as an inheritance—challenges us. It corrects us. It says that we can no longer be a part of a culture that abuses power, individually or corporately.

When we see Jesus as our sole source of salvation, we are bound to see the contradiction of life in Christ and life where survival of our culture is more important than anything else.

In order to appreciate this new life, we have to embrace this salvation and recognize that we have done nothing to provide it. William Eng speaks a word, not one unlike Simian, to us; a sword that pierces our souls as well. He said, "The church that marries the spirit of an age or a society, a culture, a politic—a church that marries the spirit of an age becomes a widow in the next generation."

I wonder how many of us would confess that our salvation experience has become infected with so many parts of our lives that have nothing to do with salvation—parts that really have nothing to do with life at all.

Laurie Laurens writes for the Mennonite Quarterly. She talks about her six-year-old daughter asking her how she and her husband (the six-year-old's father) met. And she admits that while they were at the university, one afternoon she slipped into a lecture and just by chance sat down next to the little girl's father, her future husband. It was a warm afternoon. The lecture droned on for some time. It just was one of those lectures during which it was hard to stay awake. As chance would have, it they both fell asleep. And they didn't awaken until the lecture was long over and the entire auditorium was empty. They were startled. And her future husband looked at her and said, "Even though we have slept together, I'll still respect you tomorrow." But writing for the Mennonite Quarterly, Laurie Laurens decided to tell her daughter she simply met her husband at college.

Are we of the mind to be honest with our children, with our spouses and say first and foremost we are bound to Jesus Christ?—Jesus who came and was obedient to his heavenly father; Jesus who teaches repentance and the beginning of a new kingdom: God's kingdom in this life; Jesus to whom we are betrothed who stops everything and pays attention to one person's needs after another. We are married to Jesus who repeatedly withdraws to pray—Jesus who is led by his prayer life to sacrifice; Jesus, who will say “Not my will, but thine.”

Maybe we are reluctant to compare our salvation with our bonds to our spouses. But are we also reluctant to examine exactly where our prayer life is leading us?

The decisions that we make in our families, in our careers, in our individual preferences for how to live: Do they require any loyalty beyond our own? Is there any sense of struggle in what we decide to do in our betrothal to one God alive in our midst? Is our soul mate truly guiding our lives?

I'll close with a story of a mother in Illinois. She was having problems with her children. So one day while they were gone, she wrote a note and taped it to the door. When they found it, they found that she had declared herself on strike. She was holed up in the tree house in the back yard. She refused to come down even after they did all the laundry, even after they baked her cupcakes and brought them to her. She would not come down until finally they submitted to her a new resolve. And here's what she demanded—that they would pitch in whenever they saw something that needed to be done, that they would all act their age and not like babies, that they would stop smarting off to her and to one another. And here was one of my favorites: that they would come whenever they were called, that they would give and take on an equal basis, and that there would be no hitting and no hurting one another.

I believe our prayer life. I believe coming into this sanctuary and participating in this community is no less demanding. I believe God is asking us in Jesus Christ to recognize that our lives are set apart for a holy purpose. And if all that sounds too hard to digest, all it means is we have to pitch in. And that sometimes we have to grow up. And we have to be sincere and less sarcastic with one another. And that we have to come when God calls. That we have to learn to receive and to give. And that we can adopt the pattern of life which Christ adopted to be people about healing one another and not about hurting one another. That's what it means to see our salvation. Even a child can learn to do this.

So may it be. Amen.