

Sermon – 28/12/08
Revd Susanna Pain

Luke 2:22-40 Christmas 1B

A small hidden incident. What difference did it make?

How did they know? What did they know?
That their meeting was over.
That God is faithful.

How are you just after Christmas?
What is new, what has changed?
I count my blessings and give thanks. I rest. I wait for God to speak in my life. Sally and Jacque sleep on my lap. It rains buckets. The pond outside my window is full. Still it rains.
The picnic was rained out...
The gift of today as it was on Thursday is 'God is with us'.
The gift of Jesus recognised by the old ones, the poor, devoted ones and I have to be reminded over and over again.

And what did these poor ones see?
They saw a poor couple (they brought sacrifices of two birds, not a bird and a lamb) a poor couple, with a tiny baby, 6 weeks old. No different from any other couple, coming up to the temple for the same ritual of purification.
Yet Anna and Simeon recognised something and Simeon proclaims a long awaited gift for all nations, and speaks of the conflict the child will cause. Anna sees Jesus, cuddles him and tells others about this child.
Anna and Simeon's meeting is fulfilled, yet their words will require patience on the part of Mary and Joseph... Jesus has a lot of growing up to do yet.
Henri Nouwen reflects. *'God says "I love you with an everlasting love", and Jesus came to tell us that. We are the Beloved, not because we did anything, not because we proved ourselves. Basically, God loves us whatever we do. If that's true, these few years that we are in the world, we are sent to say, in the midst of our life. "Yes, God, I love you, too"'*.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin writes
'Above all, trust the slow work of God. We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We should like to skip the intermediate stages. We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new. And yet it is the law of progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability – and that it may take a very long time.'

Excerpt from *'Patient Trust'* Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

'Some things may take a very long time' Do we try to rush God's work along in our lives? In our church?

Anna and Simeon were very old. They waited a very long time to find what they were looking for.

What did they notice?

A young couple with a 6 week old baby fulfilling their religious obligations?

Nothing new in that.

Was it the baby - at six weeks that was different? I don't think so.

What inspired them, gave them hope?

Perhaps it was an intuitive response – a knowing?

'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 ...

At that moment, Anne came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Something special's going on here. These two elderly people Simeon and Anna – know something and proclaim it for all to hear – This little one is special. You'll see. Looking on, are we caught up in the action? Or sceptical?

I'm inclined to listen to these two faithful devout people.

To give them the benefit of the doubt – why do I believe them?

They have nothing to lose, they've independently been waiting so long. Today something has moved them. We'll have to wait and see what becomes of these prophecies.

More waiting

with a different flavour,

watching this vulnerable child grow up.

Just as God cares for us, it's very important that we care for God in the world. If God is born like a little baby, God cannot walk or speak unless someone teaches God. That's the story of Jesus, who needs human beings in order to grow. God is saying "I want to be weak so you can love me. What better way to help you respond to my love than becoming weak so you can care for me?" God became a stumbling God who falls at the cross, who dies for us, and who is totally in need of love. God does this so that we can get close. The God who loves us is a God who becomes vulnerable, dependent in the manger and dependent on the cross, a God who basically is saying, "Are you there for me?"

The greatest part of Jesus' life is a hidden life. It is a life lived under the authority of his parents during which he grew to maturity and increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God, and people. Although the gospels remain silent about this period of Jesus' life, this silence is very revealing. It reveals that the good news is first of all that God came to live among us, to be Emmanuel, God with us, and to share the ordinariness of our daily existence. Jesus wanted to be known as we are known. In God's eyes the most significant is often the most hidden. (Henri Nouwen)

Butterfly story

(Don't try to hurry the process of moving from the chrysalis to flying – you could cause irreparable damage.)