



Sunday December 27, 2020  
Luke 2:22-40 (First Sunday of Christmas)

Pastor Tony Acompnado

As we head into these final days of 2020 and approach the beginning of a new year, it seems that so many people are starting to make their annual lists. Lists about what they've experienced over the past year, things they wanted to accomplish, dreams they had hoped would be fulfilled, or all the losses they've encountered as a result of the pandemic. I think most of us do this in some way or another, whether it's a list as a means of looking back, or one that looks ahead to the goals we want to achieve, the people we want to reconnect with, the places we want to travel, or the changes we want to make in our lives.

Children often do this kind of dreaming about what they'd like to do in their future, and I'm guessing that becoming a professional athlete, musician, or internet star might be some of the more popular ones. As adults, we tend to think of this as a bucket list – you know, a list of things you want to do before you “kick the bucket.” And sure, this may be a slightly crude way of looking at our inevitable demise, but it does call us to focus on living and not dying. So, it makes me wonder... do you have a list of things you're dreaming about? Do you have a bucket list?

When I was growing up, I dreamed of playing basketball for the Wisconsin Badgers. I also dreamed of being a fighter pilot, a police officer, winning the Ironman triathlon in Hawaii, riding my bike across the United States, and there *was* even a very brief moment in time when I was very young that I had a dream of becoming a priest – but that's a much longer conversation than we have time for this morning – let's just say it wasn't always a dream of mine, and well, we see how that turned out.

But today we're going to talk about Simeon, a man whose dream did come true – and after many, many years of faithfully waiting, the only thing on his bucket list was finally realized and it was more wonderful than he could have ever imagined. Today it's my hope that Simeon's dream would also come true in each of our lives and bring us more joy and hope than *we* have ever imagined.

We're told that the Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would see the Lord's Messiah before he died. And it was just that “*one thing*” on Simeon's bucket list. No trip to Hawaii or a climb up Mt. Everest; no French dinner in Paris at midnight or winning the lottery. Just one thing — to finally see God's promise come true in the birth of a Savior.

And that's a pretty big “one thing.” As it turns out, it was even bigger than Simeon thought. We're told that Simeon was looking forward to the “consolation of Israel.” In other words, he was looking forward to the salvation of God's people, Israel. But look at what happens. The Holy Spirit reveals to Simeon (*even though we're not told how*) that he would see the Lord's Messiah before he died. And so, everyday Simeon would look for a child born the Messiah. Every day, as parents brought their children to the Temple for the rites of purification, Simeon would look to see if maybe this one was the Christ. And when Mary and Joseph appeared in the Temple with Jesus, Simeon knew, he just knew, this was the one!

He took the child in his arms and that's when something happened that no one anticipated, not even Simeon. Simeon gazed into the baby Jesus' eyes and declared that this child was not only Israel's salvation, but the salvation of the whole world!

And I don't think we quite catch the magnitude of this statement because having been brought up in the Christian tradition we believe that Jesus came for the salvation of all people. To say the Messiah, the Christ, had come for the salvation of Israel was one thing, but to say the Messiah, the Christ, had come for *all people* — well that was something else – that was something radically new!



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To hear that the salvation Jesus brings is for all people is really quite remarkable. It really is Good News! And there's a reason why Luke goes out of his way to show Jesus' Jewishness – I think it has to do largely with the need to connect Jesus with the God of Israel. Jesus was not just a son of *a god*, he was the Son of THE God! The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The God of creation. The God of the Exodus. The God of the wilderness. The one and only true God – not one of those fake Greek or Roman gods. Jesus the Messiah, the Christ, becomes the gospel story of the Law fulfilled and the living out of God's promised salvation for all people.

Back in 2008 there was a movie called, *The Bucket List*, and in this comedic drama Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman star as two cancer patients who become the most unlikely of friends and end up spending three months together — each fulfilling a “bucket list” of things they'd always wanted to do before dying. What they discover is that their bucket lists really have more to do with living fully and faithfully than with dying. They end up discovering that what gives them the greatest joy aren't the selfish, self-centered items on their bucket lists, but the things they took for granted like a meal with family or the love shared between friends. Jack Nicholson's character learns the hard way and it takes the death of his friend for his character to re-engage with his estranged daughter and know the saving grace that flows from forgiveness. And while there's nothing earth shattering about this movie, nothing terribly profound, it does perhaps call into question the value of a having a bucket list, and the content of that bucket list.

Our larger context is the Christian faith. As Lutheran Christians, we believe that we're saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. We believe that God's gift of eternal life begins right here and now. We know the grace of forgiveness. We know the joy of faith. So maybe a Christian Bucket List is something we might consider – and not because we're afraid to die, but because in Christ we're longing to live!

And maybe we can learn something from old Simeon. Because, despite the dark days that may lie ahead, what's important to Simeon is that this baby is indeed the Messiah, the Christ, and in that, God kept his promise. So what if the first thing on our bucket list was a genuine hope to see Christ in our lives as well? If that were on our bucket list then I'm pretty sure it wouldn't take long to discover the fact that we can and do see Jesus, the Messiah, each and every day — when we look for him. When we look carefully then we will see God's saving grace in acts of care and compassion, in the love we share as the family of God, in the forgiveness we experience and the forgiveness we extend. Beyond that, our individual bucket lists could still contain a multitude of different things, but they would all find themselves flowing from a life of faith grounded in Jesus Christ.

So, don't get me wrong, there's nothing sinful about wanting to go to Hawaii or climb up Mt. Everest, or have a French dinner in Paris at midnight or win the lottery. It's more a matter of discovering the joys of faithful living that come to us through God's gifts in everyday life – through the things we take for granted, and the people we see regularly – and after this past year, all the people we don't see regularly.

My friends, God is at work in our everyday lives, reaching out and calling us to greater depths of love for God and our neighbor. As followers of Jesus, it's always been about living – living faithfully and fully, and not worrying about dying — because Christ has already done the dying for us. Thanks be to God! Amen.