

“Two Who Were Inspired” A First Sunday of Christmastide Meditation
Offered by Rev. W. Dale Osborne on 12/31/2017
Lectionary texts: Isaiah 61:10 – 62:3, Psalm 148, Galatians 4:4-7, Luke 2: 22-40

I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For U2, 1987

I have climbed the highest mountains - I run through the fields

Only to be with you, Only to be with you

I have run I have crawled - I have scaled these city walls, These city walls - Only to be with you

But I still haven't found What I'm looking for - But I still haven't found What I'm looking for

I have kissed honey lips - Felt the healing in the fingertips - It burned like fire, This burning desire

I have spoke with the tongue of angels, I have held the hand of a devil

It was one empty night, I was cold as a stone - But I still haven't found What I'm looking for

But I still haven't found What I'm looking for

I believe when the Kingdom comes Then all the colors will bleed into one, Bleed into one

But yes I'm still running.

You broke the bonds, You loosened the chains, You carried the cross, Of my shame Of my shame

You know I believed it But I still haven't found What I'm looking for

But I still haven't found What I'm looking for But I still haven't found What I'm looking for But I still haven't found What I'm looking for

Songwriters: ADAM CLAYTON, DAVE EVANS, LARRY MULLEN, PAUL DAVID HEWSON, VICTOR REINA penned the lyrics to that song in 1987. Thirty years ago, Bono and the band called U2 made it the cornerstone of their album titled *The Joshua Tree*. The *Salvation Tree* if we translate the name Joshua.

The song speaks of a great longing. A longing that many of us share. Let me find what I am looking for God. Guide me to the salvation my soul seeks. Lead me to the revelation of your Kingdom so that I may sing joyously of your eternal presence and strength.

Of course, in the song, the singer may be seeking something a bit more tangible. The love and touch of another human being perhaps. I think that's a little closer to what many of us may find ourselves looking for. While we may not be looking for the salvation of our people, we may be looking for an end to violence in our streets. We may not be seeking the coming of a Messiah, but we may be looking for a relationship that has meaning and purpose. We may not be patiently waiting for the overthrow of an oppressive regime, but we may be looking for the right academic major. The course of study that could set someone on a trajectory of health care, human rights advocacy, law, social work, teaching or landscaping. Maybe if I find what I am looking for, “God will clothe me with the garments of salvation, cover me with the robe of righteousness, adorn me with the garland and jewels of a wedding couple.” Isn't that what we just heard Alex read from Isaiah, the ancient prophet? Wow, that would be pretty incredible. Just have to find what I'm looking for. I just have to sit down or stand up or meditate or cogitate or discover and deliberate on what I am looking for.

In our passage from Luke's gospel a number of people are looking for a variety of things. Mary and Joseph are looking to fulfill some very ancient traditions of their faith. They are bringing their first born son into the temple for circumcision, proper naming, presentation before God and Mary is hoping for purification after childbirth.

She brought her two turtledoves as a sacrifice. She and Joseph wanted to do right by Jesus so that his upbringing as a Jewish child might get off to a positive and holy start. We do something a bit similar here at Binkley. We have a tradition of dedicating a child at a young age. The child is dedicated to God's glory. The parents and the gathered church community dedicate themselves to bringing the child up in a holy and loving Christian environment. No turtledoves are required but there are implications of sacrifice just the same. Jesus was surrounded by parents who loved him as he came to the temple in Jerusalem.

There are two other named participants in this early experience in the life of Jesus. Their time in scripture is brief but their level of Inspiration is magnificent. Simeon is the first to be mentioned. I can only imagine how excited he was to see the baby Jesus in the temple. I greatly enjoy holding the babies who are dedicated here at Binkley but I generally ask the parents prior to taking the child from their loving arms. Not so for Simeon in our story. He had been waiting for the arrival of baby Jesus for a long time. The Spirit of God had guided him to this very spot at just the right time. He was inspired by God's guidance to carefully take the child in his own arms and present him in a way that must have been surprising for his parents. This child, this little baby in my arms shall be a light to all people. His coming will allow me to be dismissed from my longing and desire in peace. My eyes have seen your salvation in this wee child God. What I have seen this day will cause light to shine on all Gentiles and Israelites alike. This is what I have been inspired to wait for for many years. You can hear both thanksgiving and anxious wonderment in his proclamation. "Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed--and a sword will pierce your own soul too." The inspiration and proclamation of Simeon would surely be revealed in the decades and centuries to follow.

Finally, there is the very old and very devout Anna of the tribe of Asher. This woman spent countless hours praising God in the temple. Day after day she would most likely sing and pray in the temple. As she sang and as she prayed she gained inspiration and strength. Her singing in the temple reminds me of Carol Rhodes who sings in this temple as she tidies up our worship space after every Sunday service. Luke calls Anna a prophet who never left the temple. Therefore she was in the temple when Mary and Joseph brought their holy child to be dedicated to God. "At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem." All who heard her, including Mary and Joseph must have been amazed by her inspirational words.

At the end of this passage our connections to Simeon and Asher are closed off in literary form. But their revelations, their proclamations, their glorious inspirations give us hope. Hope that we too might find what we are looking for. From the child in our midst to the college students to the older members, I pray that in 2018, we might all find what we are looking for. May God be with you in your search.

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations. For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Galatians 4:4-7

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

Luke 2:22-40

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 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, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed--and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.