

## **“Loving Jesus: Simeon – The Spirit and Salvation”**

**By Pastor John Vick**

Asbury United Methodist Church

April 11, 2021

- We are going to begin this sermon by memorizing a Bible verse together. This is actually my favorite Bible verse.
  - It’s seven words. Anyone can remember seven words. The verse is 1<sup>st</sup> John 4:19. It’s up on the screens:
    - “**We love because he first loved us.**”
    - Let’s say that together... One more time...
    - Isn’t that a great verse? I hope that by the end of this service, we will all have it memorized.
  - In commenting upon this Bible verse, John Wesley said, **“This is the sum of all religion, the genuine model of Christianity.”**
- I wanted to begin this sermon with 1<sup>st</sup> John 4:19, because this is the first Sunday in a new sermon series. Last week, Pastor Tom wrapped up the PRAYER series we were in, and today we begin a series called “Loving Jesus.”
  - If you don’t already have a sermon journal, this is a great day to pick one up. You can get them after the service at any of our guest services stations in the foyer.
    - But what’s special about this sermon series title, “Loving Jesus,” is that it has a double meaning.
      - 1) **First, we can use the word “loving” as an adjective.** We acknowledge that Jesus is a person who is loving. He is filled with love for us.
      - 2) **Second, we can use the word “loving” as a verb.** “Loving” is something that we do in response to Jesus’ love for us.

-Or, in other words, “We love because he first loved us.”

- Throughout this series, we’ll be looking at common, ordinary people throughout Luke’s Gospel that encountered Jesus.

-These people all came from different backgrounds, they all had different stories, they all had different struggles, but one thing is common in all of their stories: they were changed after their encounter with Jesus. Their lives were never the same.

- And as we look at these stories throughout Luke’s Gospel where people’s lives were changed because of their encounters with Jesus, I invite us to think back on our own lives.

-How has Jesus changed our lives? What kind of transformation has he brought about?

-If it weren’t for Jesus, I don’t know where I would be. I definitely wouldn’t be up here today!

-It’s a beautiful thing, that Jesus meets us where we are, just as we are, and transforms our lives for the good.

- This morning, we are looking at the story of Jesus being presented in the Temple as a 40-day-old infant.

-This story is found in Luke 2:22-35. Out of the reverence we have in our hearts for the word of God, let’s stand together and read these verses out loud:

-(**Luke 2:22-35**)

- Alright, there’s a lot going on in this passage of Scripture. Let’s begin by looking at what Mary and Joseph were doing at the Temple in the first place.

-They were simply doing what the law asked of them to do. In fact, there were actually doing two separate activities.

- First, they were there for their purification, as we read in the first verse.
- Forty days after a male child was born, the family would come to the Temple and present two sacrifices before the Lord: a burnt offering and a sin offering. You can read more about that in Leviticus 12.
- So that's the first reason they are there in the Temple.
- The second reason, though, was to present, or dedicate, Jesus to God. It was common practice for families to dedicate their firstborn to the Lord. The scripture that was quoted in our passage is Exodus 13:2: "The Lord said to Moses, "Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine."
- So again, that's why Mary, Joseph, and Jesus are there in the Temple. They are doing what the law asked of them to do.
  
- Now, let's look at Jesus in this passage. This series is called "Loving Jesus," and we are looking at his loving character throughout the Gospel of Luke.
- So how do we see the "loving" character of Jesus in this passage of Scripture? I mean, he's 40 days old! He can't even talk yet! How do we see his loving character present?
  
- Well, I believe that there is so much that we can learn about the character and heart of Christ, even as a 40-day old child.
- There's a great Christmas hymn by Charles Wesley called, "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus."
- Well, in 2017, contemporary Christian artist Meredith Andrews recorded a cover of that classic hymn, and she added a modern bride to the hymn as well.

-It goes, “You draw the hearts of shepherds, You draw the hearts of kings, Even as a baby, You were changing everything, You, called me to Your Kingdom, Before Your lips could speak, And even as a baby, You were reaching out for me...”

-So, even though Jesus is a baby in this passage, doesn't mean we can't learn about him and his loving character.

- We see his loving character, perhaps most clearly, in the way that Jesus comes to us.

-Jesus took the initiative. When we were stuck, alone, abandoned, when we couldn't come to Him, He came to us.

-He moved into our neighborhood. He took on flesh. He sought us out.

- Even more, Jesus came to us in humility. He wasn't born into wealth. There weren't parades of people celebrating his birth. Instead, his family was a poor, working family. They had little means.

-Looking back at our text, what pair of animals did Mary and Joseph bring for their offering? It was a pair of turtledoves or pigeons.

-In Leviticus 12, though, we read that the offering actually called for a lamb and a pigeon. But the text also says this:

-“And if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for her, and she shall be clean.”

-So, Mary and Joseph were bringing a pair of turtledoves or pigeons, because they couldn't afford a lamb.

-That's the family that Jesus was born into. Not a family with wealth or means or power of influence. Instead, he was born into a family that couldn't afford a lamb for the offering.

- I don't know about you, but I certainly see the "loving" character of Christ in that. In this idea that Jesus came to us in humility.

-And all throughout his life, he was spending time with those who no one else wanted to associate themselves with. He would go around and even ask people, "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus, the King of Glory, would ask that.

- Jesus coming to us in humility is something that the Apostle Paul definitely picked up on in his letters.

-In 2 Corinthians, as he was writing about generosity, he pointed to Christ and his example.

-He wrote these words (2 Cor. 8:9): "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."

- Or what Philippians chapter 2, and what Paul says there:

-"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

-The New Testament points to a Christ who is generous. A Christ who comes to us. A Christ who extends an invitation to us, and says, "Come, follow me."

-Yes, in his generous act of coming to us in poverty, in humility, we certainly see the “loving” character of Jesus.

- So, we just looked at “loving Jesus” as an adjective. Now, let’s shift gears and talk about “loving Jesus” as a verb. As an action.

- We’ll do that by looking at the remaining characters in this story: Simeon, and Mary and Joseph.

- Let’s look at Simeon first.

- Now, I do have to share this embarrassing story first. When I was in high school, I would often serve as the liturgist at my home church. What that entailed, was reading the Scripture passage before the sermon each Sunday morning.

- Well, one Sunday, our pastor was preaching from this same text. And I got up to read it, but I thought that Simeon’s name was “Simon.” Hey, it’s a biblical name too!

- So, every time that the name “Simeon” was in the text, I pronounced it “Simon.”

- So, on that Sunday, I sat down after reading the passage in front of the church, and I thought I just rocked it.

- Then, our pastor came up, and started talking about “Simeon,” not “Simon.” Thankfully, he was a gracious person and didn’t say anything about me saying his name wrong.

- But, all of that to say, you probably won’t forget how to pronounce Simeon’s name now.

- So, if we were to do a character sketch on Simeon, there’s several things that we could say.

- We could begin by saying that this is the **only time he is mentioned in Scripture**. Nowhere before or after this passage do we read about Simeon.

-However, all that we read about him is good! Even though he is just found in one chapter of the Bible, he gets a good report.

-That's a lot better than being in the Bible once for doing something bad! And there are some characters like that in the Bible.

- Another thing we could say about Simeon, is that he was **righteous and devout**. That comes straight out of the text. He was a righteous person. He lived in a way that reflected the holiness of God.

-Also, he was **looking forward to the "consolation of Israel."** He was awaiting the salvation that would come once the Messiah appeared.

- One of my favorite things about Simeon, is how **sensitive he was to the Holy Spirit**.

-In back-to-back-to-back verses, Simeon is described as one who is in-tune with the Holy Spirit.

-In verse 25, it says that the Holy Spirit rested upon him. In verse 26, it says that the Holy Spirit revealed to him that he would see the Messiah before his death. And in verse 27, it says that he came "in the Spirit" to the Temple.

- You know, that's the kind of person I long to be. A person who is filled with the Holy Spirit and allows Him to lead and guide me each day.

-Of course, the question becomes, "How?" How do we cultivate these lives that are sensitive to the Holy Spirit?

-Well, there are several ways, but one of the best ways is through prayer. We just finished a 7-week sermon series on

prayer. In prayer, in our dialogue with God, we become more in-tune with what the Holy Spirit is saying.

-Simeon most certainly had a vibrant prayer life – a prayer life where he would both speak to and hear from the Lord.

- This is the point I really want to emphasize: **Simeon realized how blessed and favored he was to have seen Jesus, the Messiah!**

-When he saw Jesus, the text says that he “took him up in his arms and blessed God.”

-So this past week, **this painting by Ron DiCianni** was sent in to Pastor Tom, and Pastor Tom shared it with me.

-It’s a painting of Simeon holding Jesus. Isn’t the joy in Simeon’s face almost palpable?

-Well, when Pastor Tom shared that with me, I thought, “I think I’ve seen that somewhere before...” Well, it’s hanging up on Pastor Dick Read’s office wall. That’s where I saw it.

-I actually talked with Pastor Dick about the painting this and asked him why he found it meaningful enough to hang on his wall. He came back with three words to describe it:

-Worship, relief, and awe...

-All three of those words describe what Simeon is experiencing in this story.

- He worshipped, and was relieved, and was in awe, that he – just a person living in Jerusalem – was able to see the Lord’s Christ, the Messiah.

-He proclaims, “Lord, you are now letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation...”



-Simeon, with his very own eyes, saw the Savior of all nations. And again, he realized how blessed and favored he was for that to happen.

- Later in Jesus' life, once his ministry is in full swing, he talks about this with his disciples.

-In Matthew 13, Jesus says to them, "But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

-Isn't that profound? Jesus talks about these prophets (people like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Daniel and Zephaniah), these people who proclaimed messages that pointed to the coming Messiah, but they never actually got to see him.

-Or the righteous people (which is actually what Simeon is referred to as in Luke 2) who longing to see the coming of the Messiah, but never did.

- In a way, I was reminded of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s final speech before his death, "I Have Been to the Mountaintop."

-In that speech, he talks about the hope he has for the future, (where people from all different races will live together in harmony) but how they aren't there just yet.

-This is from the last paragraph of his speech:

-"Well, I don't know what will happen now; we've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life—longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And

I've looked over, and I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land.”

-And so I think of these prophets and righteous people who lived during the Old Testament time. These people who had “been to the mountain top,” but never actually got to see the person of Jesus, the Messiah.

-But Simeon did get to see Him. And he rejoiced. And blessed and worshipped God. That’s how Simeon responded to “loving Jesus.”

- And so what about us? How can we follow Simeon’s example?

- Well, like Simeon, we can respond to the blessedness of knowing Jesus, by praising and worshipping God.

- We can acknowledge the great blessing of “seeing Jesus” and having a personal relationship with Him.

- Alright, let’s look at our final characters in the text this morning: Mary and Joseph.

- How do Mary and Joseph respond to “loving Jesus?” Well, I have one word I want to share with you all: MAREL. Mary and Joseph MARVELED.

- This is what we read in verse 33, after Simeon’s blessing: “And his father and his mother MARVELED at what was said about him.”

- Whenever I met with Pastor Tom a few weeks ago and we looked at this text together, that was the word that stood out to us. MARVEL.

- Let’s look at up on the screens at the kind of marvel we’re talking about (Picture of MARVEL comics)... Not that Marvel

-It's the Greek word **thaumazó**, meaning "to be astonished, to wonder, to marvel."

-The word is found 44 times in the New Testament, with the majority of its uses in the four Gospels.

-Time and time again, we read about the person of Jesus marveling people. The crowds marveled, they were amazed at Him. Jesus is a marvelous person with marvelous love.

-In fact, we have a hymn, "How marvelous. How wonderful. Is my Savior's love for me."

- Well going back to our text, we see Mary and Joseph marveling at Jesus and the words that were spoken about him.

-They were just having an ordinary day. They were going to the Temple, just to do what was asked of them by the law.

-Then, after this unexpected encounter with Simeon, they marveled. They were astonished.

- Let me ask you, "When was the last time you marveled because Jesus?"

-Last week was Holy Week, the most significant week of the entire year, as we remembered the week of Jesus' death and resurrection.

-I know many of us were here or watching online. We took part in his last meal with the disciples on Thursday. We were there when he was crucified on Friday. And we danced when he was resurrected on Sunday.

-What if, each day of our lives, we lived in that state of MARVEL. That state of being amazed and astonished by the person of "loving Jesus."

- A couple of years ago, the Handel and Hayden Society Orchestra in Boston was doing a performance.
  - (Now, they're a pretty great orchestra, but they don't hold a candle to our orchestra here.)
  - Anyway, as the final note was being played at this performance, and things were starting to quiet down, a loud "WOW" was heard from the audience.
  
- It was loud enough for the president of the society to hear... and he was so moved by the "wow." So, he sent an email to *every person* who was in attendance at the performance. He wanted to find out who was the person who said "wow!"
  - Well, after sending out all of those emails, he found out that the "wow" came from a 9-year-old boy named Ronan.
  - Ronan is autistic, and he is considered "non-verbal."
  - But, when he heard the beauty of the orchestra, the glory of all of these instruments coming together, this precious young boy couldn't help but marvel and say "wow!"
  - And the thing was, his "wow" touched the hearts of so many... including the musicians. They even arranged a private chello performance in Ronan's home.
  
- Like Mary and Joseph, like little Ronan, I hope to say "wow" more each day. I hope to live in that place of awe and astonishment and marvel at the character of loving Jesus.
  - And so, where do we go from here? How do we apply this to our lives?
  - Well, like Simeon, let's respond to the blessedness of knowing "loving Jesus" with praise and worship. By lifting up our eyes and giving thanks to God!

-Like Mary and Joseph, let's marvel at the goodness of God. Let's live in wonder and amazement. Let's say "wow" more!

- And I have one more thing for us to do. Out in the foyer, we are having our "Community Fair" as a church.

- All of our Discipleship Communities are present and would love to talk with you, and answer any questions you may have.

- I encourage each of you, to stop by some tables, and try to find a community to plug in with if you don't have one already.

- Community is so important for many reasons, and one of the greatest reasons, is that there are many "Simeons" here at Asbury.

- There are so many righteous and devout, Spirit-filled people in our congregation. And we can learn so much from them, and be encouraged by their faith.

- And so, following this service, stop by a few tables and check out the different communities that are present here at Asbury.

- Alright, as we get ready to come to the Lord's Table for communion this morning, we remember how "loving" Jesus really is.

- We remember all that he went through, in order to save us and redeem us and show us how much he loves us. He allowed himself to be betrayed and arrested. His body was broken and his blood was shed. For you and for me. For many.

- Because Jesus is loving. He first loved us. And now we respond by coming to His table. In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.