

## I Could Die Right Now... I Could Live Right Now

*Luke 2:22-40*

*Living God, let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.*

Have you ever had one of those experiences in life that are so exceptionally fulfilling that for a fleeting moment you sit back and say to yourself, “You know... I could die happy right now”? I had one of those just this week! I was in Isle of Palms, South Carolina earlier this week for a Midwinter Staff Retreat for Lutheran Campus Ministry Staff from all over the east coast, and one of the nights we went out to dinner together. And folks, I kid you not, I had the best Shrimp and Grits I’ve ever tasted. I looove Shrimp and Grits! Heck, I ALMOST attended the University of South Carolina solely because there was a restaurant just off campus that had—until last Tuesday—the best Shrimp and Grits I’ve ever tasted. Oh my goodness... Pimento Cheese Grits, Fried Green Tomatoes, and Perfectly Seasoned Shrimp... And there it was, a moment at the end of the meal where I leaned back and said to myself, “With utmost peace in my heart, I could die right now a happy man.”

Standing in the stadium in Frisco, Texas as purple and gold streamers rained down and JMU was crowned national champions. Sipping a cappuccino on top of a mountain in Switzerland with my wife as the glaciers sang through the stillness around us. And Shrimp and Grits last Tuesday! Those are just a few of the moments in life that have come and gone in the full knowledge that I, with utmost peace in my heart, could die right then.

But you know... I survived those moments. And if you’ve ever had a similar feeling of contentment and peace, if you’re sitting here today, you’ve survived it too. As happy as I was, there are more JMU National Championships to win... there are other beautiful mountains to see... there may just be a better plate of Shrimp and Grits. Whatever peace we find in those moments of fulfillment inevitably come and go.

But there’s something similar and deeply different about the story we find in Luke’s Gospel on this Presentation of our Lord Sunday. “It had been revealed to [Simeon] by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.” And now that moment has come. Jesus Christ is presented in the Temple and Simeon raises his song of praise, “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.”

I’ve heard this verse hundreds of times as it’s commonly sung as the sending from the table and as a community farewell during a funeral, but something about it resonated in a new way this week. I was struck by the implications of Simeon’s joy. He who was not to see death before witnessing to the messiah—the savior—was now seeing the messiah face to face. He was seeing his own mortality set before him. And yet, more than any football game, any mountain, or any plate of shrimp and grits could

possibly produce, Simeon finds the peace that surpasses all understanding. In peace he says, "I could die right now."

That peace doesn't go away. That peace is rooted in Christ. The song of Simeon is not a song of despair, it is a proclamation of hope. Simeon stands at the beginning of God's redemption story as he holds this 40 day old child in his arms, but in Christ he sees the story finished. He sees salvation completed for all people.

Sure, there are things in this world that can bring us peace, momentary respite from the ups and downs of life. But when we gather in worship around God's story, when we live and serve with the intentionality of disciples, when we trust that Christ is with us as we are sent out to be a Wellspring of God's grace... it's in these moments that we witness to the fullness of God's redeeming love and find the peace to press on in the way of love and life everlasting.

The gift of grace allows us to stand at the beginning of our own story of redemption, but fully know the end. In faith, we're called to witness to Christ's redeeming love and echo the praise of Simeon: "Lord, I could die right now. I trust whatever is to come to your eternal keeping. Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace."

This would've been a very different story if Simeon had seen Jesus entering the temple with his family and said, "Oh no, I'm dying. My life is over. Everything I thought I knew is ending. My eyes have seen the salvation of the Lord, and it means the end for *me*." So often I feel like this is the same trap that the church of today so easily falls into. We can see the world and the church around us changing, and it feels, sometimes, like we're dying. But Christ is still with us. There are new signs of life and new paths upon which Christ is calling us. This new way upon which Christ calls us is only deathly inasmuch as it leads us to experience resurrection Here and now. Just yesterday this sanctuary was full of leaders from all across the Virginia Synod who were gathered to face this challenge of being Christ's church in the world today. As Bishop Humphrey reminded us in his opening remarks, "[In the story where Jesus was walking on the water and beckoned Peter our to follow him, when did Peter begin to sink?] When he took his eye off Jesus....We NEED to keep number 1 number 1." Friends, Christ is here, Christ is calling, Christ is making a new way for his church on earth. This new way will be a challenge. It will be a way of dying AND resurrection.

Each day we are called to die to sin—to face our mortality like Simeon and trust in our redeemer's eternal love. Each day we are called to rise to new life. If Simeon meets Christ with the hope that says, "I could die right now", Anna meets Christ with the joy that says "I could live right now!"

Anna, the first evangelist, bears witness to this dramatic scene of death and resurrection in the Temple this day and runs to tell to story. She bears a story of hope to a weary world desperately seeking redemption. Anna bears the bold words of life that redemption is in our midst—Christ is born to save! Christ is the hope of you and of all nations! Anna shows us what it means to live, to proclaim, to know that the hope of Simeon was never meant to be a personal hope or an individual salvation... Simeon and Anna's hope is salvation for all people. That's a word that's meant to be shared.

Simeon shows us today how to face death. Anna shows us how to live. In the waters of Holy Baptism, we are, like Simeon, sent to face our death, dying to sins in the waters of salvation. And in the waters of baptism we are raised like Anna to live, to “let our light so shine before others that they may see our good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven.”

Let us meet the world with boldness, trusting in God’s faithfulness, that we might serve with newness of life. On this Candlemas, let us bear our light of hope to a world in search of redemption. Let us be quick to love, and quick to proclaim the name of Jesus who is the source of our redemption, life, and hope. As Christ’s people—named, claimed, and loved to eternal life through the waters of baptism—we are being sent out in grace to die and to live.

With the boldness of Simeon may we be sent in peace to face whatever lies ahead. With the joy of Anna may we be sent in love to share the good things God has done for us.

Amen.