

Seeing Salvation  
Luke 2:22-40  
December 31, 2023  
First Presbyterian, Luling

Simeon had been expecting to meet the Messiah for decades. He honestly, truly, really, had kept the faith and was expecting, not just hoping, to meet the Messiah. If Simeon were here today, he'd say meeting the Messiah was on his bucket list. Simeon was a faithful man, devout and righteous, Luke tells us. His expectation was sincere. He was "looking forward to the consolation of Israel," which was what the Messiah would bring. It was an expectation that it would happen before Simeon himself had died. Simeon was expecting to see the Messiah.

Sometimes we see exactly what we are expecting to see, even if it doesn't match with other people's reality. One of my family's favorite stories to tell about me happened a long time ago, I imagine I was about four years old. Our grandparents, my dad's parents, lived only about 10 minutes away, and we visited them frequently. Sometimes we would spend the day, or even the night with them. My grandmother had been a school teacher. And, I'm trying to think of a word to describe her. She was a very precise person. Things had their places, the living room drapes were drawn at the same time each morning to exactly the same spot, and returned in the evening at the same time. And I...I was her "little princess." Yes, it was a nice place to be me, a little princess.

My grandmother had been quizzing me on my colors. I remember playing along, already pretty certain about what colors were what. We had been over several, me acing her color quiz. I was her little princess, after all. And then she asked me what color her pants were. They were polyester double knit pants. And they were blue. So I said, "blue." And she said, "No Monica, they aren't blue. These pants are NAVY blue." See what I mean about precise? So "navy blue" became filed away in my little brain. Navy blue, navy blue, navy blue. I really liked to get the answers right, and I didn't want to be wrong again.

Soon after, we loaded up in the car to head back home. It was a foggy day, probably in the winter. My grandparents were in the front seat, my grandpa was driving. My brother and I were in the back seat. It was a white Chevy impala with a black roof. See? This has made a big impact on me. You already know that I can't see anything, and I didn't even wear glasses then. OK. That's all in my defense. So we're driving between Fort Worth and Arlington, in what was then a little strip of rural area in the flood plain. There were cows in a field a ways back from the road. And so my grandmother resumes her color quiz. She asks me what color those cows are. I fancied myself quite the cow expert, because my relatives on the other side of the family were all ranchers and I had seen cows up close. So I was proud to take into account my cow expertise AND my newfound color expertise, and confidently proclaim that those cows over there were navy blue.

You see, I was expecting something navy blue. Something that had previously appeared blue to me had become navy blue. And I had navy blue circulating through my brain. Expecting to see navy blue led me to see navy blue even when it wasn't there. I was seeing something that everyone else thought was impossible, something that nobody else saw. I had expected to see navy blue cows, so see them I did.

Simeon was seeing something that he expected to see, the Messiah. Simeon was seeing something that almost everyone thought was impossible. Sure, they said they were looking for the Messiah, but they were only looking for a Messiah that would meet their own requirements and expectations. Simeon looked at the baby in his arms and saw the Messiah, saw salvation for his people, saw something that almost no one else could see.

He saw all this because he was truly expecting to see it. He was anticipating seeing a Messiah who would bring salvation, whatever salvation might turn out to be. He was watching and waiting, and he saw. He truly saw. And of course that is the difference between Simeon's experience with the infant Jesus and my experience with the cows. Simeon saw deeply, saw what was truly there. I saw what wasn't there, because I was expecting to see it. Simeon saw what was there, because he was expecting to see it.

So how do we avoid seeing what isn't there just because we are expecting to? That is, how do we avoid the navy blue cows phenomenon? And how do we instead see what is truly there, when we have held onto hope and expectation for it? How do we hold onto that expectation? There is a clue in Simeon's story. Three times, we are told that the Holy Spirit had been guiding Simeon in this expectation of the Messiah. The Holy Spirit rested on him, even though he was an old man and discounted by many. The Spirit had told him he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, he stayed in the temple, looking for the one who would save Israel.

Simeon's quest and looking for and longing for the Messiah were not something that Simeon had cooked up by himself or invented in order to give himself a cause to support or something to do. Simeon was guided by the Spirit in his expectation, his looking forward, his longing for.

And we would do well to follow Simeon in his expecting. Both in what he was expecting and how he went about expecting it. Simeon expected the consolation of Israel, expected a Messiah, expected salvation. We proclaim that we expect those same things: consolation for the whole world, a deliverer, a savior. While we have seen salvation, we await and expect its completion. It may not come before we die, but how do we live in expectation for it?

We too must be guided by the Spirit, as we wait and look and long for and expect. When we see things that no one else seems to see, when we interpret what we see in a different way, when we see what we had thought must be impossible. The Spirit is at work within us, guiding us in our expectations, guiding us in our sight, that we may see salvation with Simeon. Let's be on the lookout for it.