

Opening Thoughts: Last Sunday to give, messages online

Title: The Wonder of God's Plan - A new era ushered in by an older generation
Text: Luke 2:21-40
FCF: Change
Big Idea: Transition occurs best when the established generation blesses the next generation

Introduction:

One word that is almost never associated with Christmas is **CHANGE**. With the coming of the Christ child, the greatest paradigm shift on earth is about to occur between man and God. **Change is how people worship, change from Israel to the all nations, change from law to grace, change from going to Mt. Zion to meet with God to Him living in us. Change in meeting in synagogues to homes. Change in focus from prophets, priests and kings to ordinary people. CHANGE. Lots and lots of change.**

With the end of a year and decade upon us, I thought I would use our final Christmas message of 2009 to talk about the **CHANGE - change that is happening in their world and change that is happening in ours specifically to our world on the hill. If you take a minute to notice we here at VCC/VCS are in the midst or a season of change. My presence here is a sign of that. In all my life I have never seen a church go through so much change so quickly. Every key leadership role in the church and in the high school now has a new person sitting in it.**

I have found that everyone wants me to be the champion of change as long as I don't touch their area. In reality, change is difficult for most of us. We are creatures of habit, security and routine. This is not either good or bad in and of itself. The problem is that we living in world of ongoing change.

Today's text is all about change. I thought we would use the story of Simeon and Anna to give us some insights on the change we are facing here on the hill.

Text (Luke 2:21-40)

Dedication at the Temple:

Luke 2:21 ¶ On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.

Luke 2:22 ¶ When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord

Luke 2:23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"),

Luke 2:24 and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

Simeon:

Luke 2:25 ¶ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

Luke 2:26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

Luke 2:27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required,

Luke 2:28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

Luke 2:29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace.

Luke 2:30 For my eyes have seen your salvation,

Luke 2:31 which you have prepared in the sight of all people,

Luke 2:32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

Luke 2:33 ¶ The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him.

Luke 2:34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against,

Luke 2:35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

Anna:

Luke 2:36 ¶ There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,

Luke 2:37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.

Luke 2:38 Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Summary:

Luke 2:39 ¶ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth.

Luke 2:40 And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

If you believe, as I do, that “*God accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will*” (Ephesians 1:11), THEN there are no such things as ACCIDENTS in an absolute sense. That is, while there are many events that are NOT willed by any human (and in that sense they are accidents), nevertheless THERE ARE NO EVENTS NOT WILLED IN SOME SENSE BY GOD WHO CONTROLS ALL THINGS. THAT MEANS THERE IS “DIVINE MEANING” IN ALL EVENTS, IF WE COULD ONLY SEE IT. Usually we can’t, since now we see in a glass darkly. But sometimes, IN UNUSUAL CASES OF COINCIDENCE, WITH THE HELP OF GOD’S WORD, WE CAN PENETRATE THROUGH TO GOD’S MEANING. There is such a coincidence here in Luke 1 and 2.

PEOPLE OF GOD’S PLAN - SIMEON AND ANNA

Luke 2:25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called **SIMEON**, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

Luke 2:36 There was also a prophetess, **ANNA**, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,

Luke 2:37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.

They were SENIORS:

Why is it that ELIZABETH, ZECHARIAH (JOHN THE BAPTIST’S PARENTS), SIMEON, and ANNA ARE ALL VERY OLD? Why did God ordain that the parents of the last prophet TO BE AGED and that the parents of the Messiah TO BE YOUNG? Why are the two witnesses Simeon and Anna ON THE POINT OF DEATH when they see Jesus and testify to him? The question arises NOT JUST OUT OF INCIDENTAL CURIOSITY, BUT BECAUSE LUKE HIMSELF SEEMS TO STRESS THEIR AGE. HE MAKES IT EXPLICIT IN EACH CASE (1:7; 2:29, 36f.).

I believe their AGE is of critical importance to us here. While society basis great emphasis on youth, energy, the latest fad or aptitude to tech wizardly, God says, *“I CHOOSE FAITHFUL AND DEVOUT SENIORS TO USHER IN MY NEXT MOVE.”* While many seniors today feel pushed to the boundaries of irrelevancy, regrettably even in the church, God say’s: *“I cast SENIORS as the central figures of the Christmas story.”* God sovereignly chooses the older generation to usher in His next movement. To often Seniors get cast of inhibitors of God’s next move. Not so here. God says: *“I want Seniors to bring something to the next generation and I want the next generation to look for something through the Seniors.”*

I believe it is significant that seniors usher in a new chapter. I believe it is important that the younger generation does not take it away by demanding their way. Sovereignly, God want the older to work with the younger to continue that advancement of the kingdom.

As your pastor, I am striving to build at VCC AN INTERGENERATIONAL CHURCH where both young and old serve and worship, live and love side by side. Each Sunday I speak to an audience who ages range from 9 to 90. I am looking for a worship leader who is also aware of this fact. Some churches feel those worlds are too vast to bridge and it becomes necessary to create two services that cater to both audiences each with its own worship style and dress. I believe such trends tend to split the church. My observation is that when that happens, a pattern, however, subtle and unintentional, is that two worlds emerge that rarely overlap. I have several problems with this.

FIRST, does HEAVEN have a **TRADITIONAL** and **CONTEMPORARY** service?

SECOND, it shows that we lack in **DEFERENCE**. Essentially we are saying: “Loving those a generation is too hard, so let’s not try.”

FINALLY, it all but eliminates the mentoring from Paul to Timothy. (Rhonda and Anthony).

INTEGRATION IS THE GOAL NOT SEGRATION (Family Sunday on last Sunday of the month).

Ultimately, intergenerational churches wrestle not over **music style, dress, communion modes or forms of art**. It is a battle for **CONTROL**. This is why I see this text a crucial one for helping us with transitional moments. The older generation dominates the scene and works with the younger generation to discern and implement God's will and plan. There is **HONOR, DEFERENCE AND A SENSE THAT GOD IS DOING A NEW THING**. I believe these are many themes we now are facing at VCC.

They were REGULARLY FOUND IN GOD'S HOUSE:

In all four cases these old saints are pictured as **VERY DEVOUT AND GODLY**. In the case of Elizabeth and Zechariah, Luke stressed that they walked in all the commandments of the law and were righteous before God (1:6). Anna worshipped day and night in the temple by prayer and fasting (2:37). In all of them, Luke stressed that they were **DEVOUT TEMPLE-GOERS**. This virtue of being found in God's house is highly significant.

There is a trend today that concerns me. Hanging out with God in His house seems to be seen by many as "one good option among many." If I am need to catch up on work, sleep, family, housework, football, then perhaps I will take a Sunday mulligan and pass this week. One way to look at our Sunday service it through a simple business manner. When my boss calls a meeting, I show up. Simple as that.

GOD CALLS A MEETING AND WE SHOULD SHOW UP.

But more important is the bridge from "duty" to "delight". Anna enjoyed God's house. *"She never left the temple but worshiped night and day..." (Luke 2:37).*

This is NOT a description of someone who is coerced, forced or guilted into church. It speaks to her hunger for the presence of God. In Star Trek terms, God house is the transporter room from this terrestrial to the heavenly. In some sense this room is no different than any other with carpet, doors, paint and windows. In another, it is not the architecture or décor that matters fully, it is the presence of God. Coming to His house, willingly, is a sign, *“God I need you.” “I want to be close.” “I want to draw near.”* Many of the Psalms of called “Psalms of ascents” about those who travelled to Jerusalem and Mount Zion to enter the Temple and be near God. The very journey would invoke praise, cleansing prayer (“Who can ascend the hill of the Lord? He who clean hands and a pure heart.”). Simeon and Anna were known for **“their love of God’s house and His presence”**. Will we be found the same?

They were LOOKING FOR GOD’S NEXT MOVE:

There is a sense of EXPECTATION in Simeon and Anna. Simeon, he says, is *“looking for the consolation of Israel”* (2:25). And Anna is *“looking for the redemption of Jerusalem”* (2:38). They are NOT simply going through the same religious gymnastics each day. They had read that God would send a Messiah and they were looking for His coming. They found promises in God’s word and they were looking for fulfillment to those promises.

I wonder if that perspective is still here today. Do wake up each day thinking: *“God, will this be the day you break through?” “Will this be the hour that the longing in my soul is satisfied?” “Is this the moment, that you fulfill what you have promised to me concerning my family, your work, VCC/VCS or this city?”* I look into some of your eyes and get the impression you have been waiting for God to do something wonderful here on the hill.

I sense that some of you believe we here at VCC are entering into some “kairos” moment. Not a “chronos” moment where time is measured chronologically or in succession, but a “kairos” moment where God is appointing this time, this people, this place for a move of His Spirit for this city He loves. I do know this, events are occurring at a rapid pace on this hill - faster than I am comfortable. It is as if God hit the reboot button and bamm a new day with new leadership, new focus, new style, new look is here. For some this is much desired, for others it brings some grief that change is here. **I assure you that the goal is not change, but discerning together what God’s calling on VCC is and walking into that.** I do not mean to abandon older manners, I simply want to fulfill what God has entrusted us to do.

THEY WERE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

There is one other facet of this passage that I should mention. I feel I would do Luke an injustice if I did not gather up **HIS REFERENCES TO THE HOLY SPIRIT AND SAY SOMETHING ABOUT THEM.** He has referred to the Holy Spirit **TEN TIMES** so far (through 2:40). That in itself shows how important the Spirit is for Luke. But **WHAT HE SAYS** about the Spirit is even more significant.

- Here in our text the Holy Spirit *was UPON* Simeon in verse 25.
- In verse 26, the *Spirit REVEALS* that Simeon will not see death until he sees the Messiah.
- Then in verse 27, *the Spirit moves Simeon* to enter the temple at just the right moment to see Jesus. (Which incidentally is a beautiful illustration of how the Spirit works to fulfill what the Spirit promises.)

IF that is all Luke said about the Spirit’s work, I suppose we would conclude, as many have, that **BEFORE** Pentecost the Spirit was *UPON* people, but afterwards he is *IN* people. That is a common view, but an oversimplification, I think.

In three places in chapter 1, Luke describes persons as **FILLED** with the Holy Spirit.

- In 1:15, *John the Baptist* will be **FILLED** with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb.
- In 1:41, *Elizabeth* was **FILLED** with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women."
- In 1:67, *Zechariah* was **FILLED** with the Holy Spirit and prophesied.

Now the remarkable thing about this is that the very phrase used here **BEFORE** Pentecost is used for what happened **AT** Pentecost and **OFTEN** **THEREAFTER**.

- In Acts 2:3, 4, **Pentecost morning** is described like this: "There appeared to them tongues as of fire distributed and resting on each of them. And **they were all FILLED with the Holy Spirit** and began to speak in other tongues."
- Then in 4:8, **Peter** is **FILLED** with the Holy Spirit and speaks to the rulers.
- In 4:31, again, the disciples "were all **FILLED** with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness."
- In 9:17, Ananias is sent to **Paul** that he may regain his sight and be **FILLED** with the Holy Spirit.
- Then finally in 13:9, **Paul** again is **FILLED** with the Holy Spirit to denounce the magician **Elymas** (see also 13:52).
- Paul (using a slightly different Greek verb) says to all Christians: "Don't get drunk with *wine* but be **FILLED** with the *Spirit*" (Ephesians 5:18). Which is an amazing parallel to Luke 1:15 where the angel says of John the Baptist, "He shall drink no *wine* ... and he shall be filled with the Holy *Spirit*." Since the very same phrase is used by the same author before and after Pentecost, it would be unwarranted to say that radically different experiences are meant.

What we should conclude is that what Christians experience as the fullness of the Spirit today was also experienced by people before Pentecost too. What is distinctively new in our experience of the Spirit I will save for another next week. In the meantime let's not oversimplify and assume that all the saints prior to Pentecost

were somehow spiritually inferior because they could not enjoy the fullness of the Holy Spirit. (VCC and the Spirit).

PURPOSE OF GOD'S PLAN - FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PROMISE

By showing us these four aged OT saints, I believe Luke wants us to see that an era is drawing to a close, the era of the law and the prophets. He shows us this by depicting the best representatives of that era as aged and at the point of death. They are passing away just like the era of the law and the prophets. Simeon and Anna were model OT saints who kept the *law* of Moses and looked with eagerness toward the hope of the *prophets*. They also CHERISHED THE HOPE OF THE OT PROPHETS. Simeon, he says, is “looking for the consolation of Israel” (2:25). And Anna is “looking for the redemption of Jerusalem” (2:38).

Era of Fulfillment is upon us:

Luke 16:16, where Jesus says, “*The law and the prophets were until John, SINCE THEN the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached.*” Luke is the ONLY gospel writer that records this saying of Jesus, so we can see that this was significant for him. Up until John the Baptist’s coming, the word and the rule of God had been proclaimed THROUGH THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS, but NOW with the arrival of Jesus the King and his forerunner John, THE WORD AND RULE OF GOD IS PROCLAIMED AND ENCOUNTERED IN A NEW WAY. Jesus *is* the Word; Jesus *is* the King; the long awaited kingdom has NOW arrived (at least partially). For those who believe in Jesus, a tremendous shift occurs: no longer do we live merely in the era of *promise* with the law and the prophets awaiting the consolation of Israel. Now we live in the era of fulfillment when the kingdom of God is preached as present and powerful, albeit not yet consummated.

The second thing Luke wants to illustrate is that there is *no conflict* between the law and the prophets and the new age of the Messiah. He shows this by depicting

the most devout people under the old era as the most receptive to the new era. Elizabeth and Zechariah and Simeon and Anna do not become resentful and angry that the Messiah has come, not even that he will be a “light for revelation to the Gentiles.” They rejoice that the new has come.

There is one other theme in our text that fits in here with Luke’s concern to present Christianity as a law-abiding religion which does not reject the Jewish faith. **FOUR TIMES** in this passage Luke draws attention to how the parents of Jesus did everything according to the Old Testament law.

According to verse 23, they presented him “*as it is written* in the law of the Lord.”

In verse 24, they offer a sacrifice “*according to what is said* in the law of the Lord.”

In verse 27, “they bring the child to do for him *according to the custom of the law.*”

And in verse 39, they leave Jerusalem only after “they had performed everything *according to the law of the Lord.*”

So the era of the law and the prophets may be passing away, but it is not because Jesus opposes the law and the prophets, rather he fulfills them.

Jesus did **NOT** come to abolish the law and the prophets **BUT TO COMPLETE THEM, TO FULFILL** them by purchasing the redemption they offered and living the life they commanded. Therefore, all the *true* saints of the Old Testament faith will welcome Jesus with open arms because he fits perfectly as the goal or climax of their faith. But the hypocrites will reject and persecute him.

Now, please allow me some graces with the text to speak to our current situation at VCC/VCS. In much of the same manner, I look the era we now find ourselves here at VCC/VCS as time of fulfillment of past promises, not necessary abandonment of old ways.

*As I understand our story, VCC started as a church catered to **YOUNG FAMILIES**. That is the story I hear from Curtis Smith each month in the 101 class. Young families cramming into a living room having church. She was also an **OUTREACHING CHURCH**. With little resources for advertising and no internet resources yet, word of mouth, the best form of communication traveled. She was **INDUSTRIOUS** maximizing her limited resources. She crammed in schools, restaurants and hotels before she landed in the little chapel. Her value on **EDUCATION**, she started a school.*

*Now, it humbles me to realize that there is a morphing of occurring between the values of the past and the personality and convictions of the Senior Pastor. Ward reminds me that I must be who I am. I am not Ward Tanneberg, I am no Ray Noah. I want to build on their legacy, maintain our **VALUES FOR FAMILIES, OUTREACH TO DUBLIN and EDUCATION** and perhaps add to them my convictions of **PERSONAL GROWTH AND MINISTRY, PRAYER, THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT and ENCOUNTERING WORSHIP**.*

the
wonder
of Christmas

for nothing
is impossible
with God



The wonder of

God's plan:

the story of

Anna and Simeon



for nothing is impossible with God

The People

of God's plan

Simeon

and

Anna

Luke 2:21-40

The People

of God's plan

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called **Simeon**, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

³⁶ There was also a prophetess, **Anna**, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,

³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.



The People

of God's plan

Facts about Simeon and Anna:

1. Seniors
2. Regularly found in God's house
3. Looking for God's next move
4. Filled with the Holy Spirit

The People

of God's plan

People FILLED with Spirit:

John the Baptist (Lk 1:15)

Elizabeth (Lk 1:41)

Zachariah (Lk 1:67)



3,000 (Acts 2:3,4)

Peter (Acts 4:8)

Disciples (Acts 4:31)

Paul (Acts 9:17 & 13:9)





The Purpose

of God's plan

“The law and the prophets were until John,
SINCE THEN the gospel of the kingdom of God
is preached.

Luke 16:16

The Purpose

of God's plan

Facts about God's Plan:

1. Era of Fulfillment is upon us
2. No conflict between Old & New
3. "Nations" always the goal

The wonder of

God's plan:

the story of

Anna and Simeon



for nothing is impossible with God