

One of the joys which I enjoy as pastor is to be able to visit our shut-ins in their homes and bring them private communion, since they are not able to join us here at church. I cannot tell you how many times, after they receive the Lord's Supper, that they tell me, "I feel so much better. I really needed that!" The assurance of the forgiveness of sins which we receive in the Lord's Supper is truly something which we all cherish, even if we do not express it in words such as these. There is such a sense of peace, knowing that our Savior has come and given His body and blood for ME! While we know God is always true to His promises to us, there is something special about receiving that personal assurance in Holy Communion that God's love has been granted to us. Through the prophet Simeon, we hear of something similar happening with an encounter with the child Jesus. For having met the infant Jesus, Simeon praised God and said, LORD, DISMISS YOUR SERVANT IN PEACE. That is the NIV reading, we are more familiar with the KJV, which says, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace. As we look at this song of praise from the mouth of Simeon this morning, we shall see that we can ask God to do the same for us, first of all 1) as we leave His house today, and also 2) as we leave this life on earth.

Simeon was a devout man who was looking forward to the time when God would fulfill His promises of sending a Savior into the world, One Who would redeem all people from their sins. **"It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ."** (26) The Lord had revealed to him that he would be allowed to see this promised Savior of the world with his own eyes, so he knew that the promise would be kept soon — during his lifetime.

According to the Law which was given through Moses, on the fortieth day the mother of a male child was to come to the temple for ceremonial purification. Since God had saved every firstborn son during the first Passover, He claimed every firstborn as His own. Therefore the firstborn son was to be consecrated to the Lord, but could be bought back with a payment of five shekels. So, to fulfill the Law of Moses, on the fortieth day, Joseph took Mary and the baby Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to do what the Law required of them. The Holy Spirit moved Simeon to go to the temple at this same time, and allowed him to recognize the infant of Joseph and Mary as the One Whom God had promised to send. So **"Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."** (28-32)

Simeon realized that the Lord had kept His promise to him, and had allowed him to see Jesus, the promised Savior of the world. So Simeon praised God and said that any time now he was ready to depart this life, for he could now do so with peace in his soul. His eyes has seen that God was fulfilling the promise of the salvation which God had promised for His people. In this little baby, Simeon recognized that God's promises were being fulfilled, that this child would lay down His life as a ransom for all people. What Jesus would accomplish for the whole world would be a light which would shine into the world of sin, even for the Gentiles. It would also be for the glory of God's people Israel, for as many people who would see the wonderful gifts being offered to them, they too would become part of God's holy people.

That was the song which Simeon used to praise God for all that had been done for him. As you probably recognized, we use that same song at times after we celebrate the Lord's Supper. We do so because we are asking two things of our heavenly Father. We are asking that we be allowed to depart from His house in the peace of forgiveness, and also, one day, to depart from this life in peace, knowing that we will be taken to be with Jesus in heaven. We are able to do both of these for the same reason, and that is because our eyes have seen the salvation which God has prepared in the sight of all people.

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace is especially a fitting and proper prayer for us to pray at the end of our communion service. We have just finished celebrating the birth of our Lord Jesus on Christmas Day. At that time we rejoiced over the fact that the Lord loved us so much that He sent His

own precious child into this world to be our Savior. So we have just been reminded that God's love for us never wavers, and He keeps all of His promises to us. Each time that we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we know that in that special meal, Jesus gives us, together with the bread and wine, His very own body and blood sacrificed for our sins. In this way He gives us the personal assurance that our sins have been washed away, never again to be remembered by Him. So we ask the Lord to send us out of His house in peace, that is, with the complete confidence of faith that He has cleansed us from all sins, and that there is nothing any longer that can cause any tensions between us and God. We are truly at peace with Him, not afraid to come before Him for any reason whatsoever. Having heard His Word to strengthen our faith, and being assured that our sins have been forgiven, we can truly depart from His house in peace, knowing that we are His dearly loved children.

But our prayer does not stop there, for, like Simeon, we are asking for something even better than that. Simeon had been promised that he would not die until he would see with his own eyes the promised Savior. Now that he had been allowed to see Jesus, the promised Savior of the world, Simeon told God that he was ready at any time to be taken from this life to his eternal home in heaven. He could now die in peace, knowing that God had fulfilled everything that He had promised to do.

So we, too, are telling God that whenever He is ready to take us from this life to live with Him in the mansions of heaven, we are ready. We will depart this life in peace, because we have the certain hope that Jesus will take us to live in the rooms of heaven which He has gone ahead to prepare for us. We do not fear the last day, or our dying day, but are actually looking forward to it. We have that confident hope because our eyes of faith have seen the salvation which God has prepared in the sight of all people.

So the peace of this season truly does belong to us, because through the eyes of faith, just like Simeon, we have beheld the Savior Whom God sent into this world to ransom us from all of our sin. So we truly can have peace within our heart, peace which exists between us and God. So we do pray, Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.