



“We Dream Of . . . The Many Who Will Not Keep Silent”

Isaiah 61: 10-62:3, Luke 2: 22-40

Rev. Jody Andrade

December 27, 2020

In George Saunders' intriguing novel, *Lincoln in the Bardo*, the reader learns about a big diverse community that's only active at night. You see, this community lives in a cemetery. The novel employs a unique artifice of revelation: spirits—or souls—narrate the story. The narrators are people who have died and are trapped between this world and the next. Each spirit wrestles with longing, with dreams not realized. There's the spirit of a man deep in love, who died just before uniting with his wife. There's the spirit of a stunningly beautiful, enslaved woman, craving justice for the many crimes committed against her. Each spirit is *dead set* on completing their own unfinished tasks before moving on to the next world.

In today's scripture, our friend Simeon is very much alive, but also in a state of waiting, seeking something elusive before he moves on. He has been promised by God he will see the Messiah before he dies. He doesn't know exactly how this will work—or why he's been called to the temple, but he listens. He trusts.

In Simeon's time, the faithful believed God lived, “dwelled,” in the temple. So, guided by the Holy Spirit, Simeon makes the smart bet and...hangs out there.

And then...Simon sees a baby. Not just a baby, but THAT baby. He takes that precious baby in his arms and he gushes. He GUSHES. He prays out loud: “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace for my eyes have seen your salvation, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel!” Simeon is literally ready to die of happiness.

We've seen gushing right here at PHPC. Babies in churches bring out gushing. “A baby! Let me see that baby! Can I hold her? He's so beautiful!”

COVID is wreaking havoc on my need to love on little ones. In normal times, I get joy in resting my hand on the top of a head of whomever is snuggled next to me during the children's sermon. I miss holding babies! I want to squeeze Robert Cason, snuggle Elizabeth Felicie Assan Mensah. I want to baptize Annie Sankey.

Remember how we baptize here? The minister takes the baby out into the congregation and gives the child to one of our members, who carries the child back up to the baptismal font. This act physically embodies the promise of our congregation to care for and help raise this child within the body of Christ. And who among us has watched the minister walk toward them and thought, “Pick me! Pick me! I want to hold that sweet baby!”

And so it is with Simeon. He sees a sweet baby, but he recognizes he’s holding oh so much more. “My eyes have seen your salvation! A light for revelation!”

Simeon is different than most people. He isn’t so much worried about what’s going to happen to HIM after he dies. No. He wants to see that the WORLD—the people right now in this life—have something good coming their way before he dies. Simeon is dreaming of a savior, a Messiah, for this world. Simeon isn’t looking UPWARD, worried about his future. Simeon is looking OUTWARD, dreaming of a better world for everyone. Right here. Right now.

You may be familiar with John 3:16: *God so loved the world that God sent God’s only begotten Son so that all who believe in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.*

Verse 16 is always followed by verse 17: *Indeed, God did not send the son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

Do you hear the difference when you read both of those verses together in John? The intention of the first verse alone can sound like good news for one, exclusive salvation: “I have accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior” meaning *I am saved and I am going to heaven*. But when we read the two verses together we hear good news for all, inclusive and immediate salvation: “God sent Jesus so that ALL might have everlasting life and that the WORLD might be saved. Now!”

That brand new baby, born a few days ago, was born for ALL THE WORLD. This is a gift, a gift of everlasting life—and of heaven on earth, that brought deep joy to Simeon. This is a gift each of us is invited to open. And this is a gift we are compelled to regift—to make sure each person we meet, each person IN THE WORLD is offered this gift of good news to open as well.

From his first breath, Jesus created community. The living, breathing souls in the stable. Simeon and Anna and Mary and Joseph in the temple. The twelve disciples who fished and walked and gathered around the table. The joy-filled good news believers who started the church.

And Jesus created THIS community. THIS community of souls who, like the spirits in *Lincoln in the Bardo*, are wanting to get it right, to say the thing we’ve been meaning to say, to offer a hand in friendship or forgiveness. We who are grieving loss, lamenting missed opportunity, desperate for fellowship, longing for camaraderie.

In *Lincoln In the Bardo*, the spirits remain lost as long as they remain focused on fixing themselves so they can move on to something better. They cast about, repeating themselves, making no progress, remaining in the darkness. But finally in one special moment, they unite behind a specific inspiration. They find a purpose, a cause behind which each of them can rally. And they join together, not to further their own individual plights, but to ensure the well-being of a young, innocent boy. And it is in those moments when they look OUTWARD rather than UPWARD, that they gain the gifts of paradise: empathy, enlightenment, understanding, and love.

Just like Simeon and Anna, Pleasant Hill, we are no longer waiting. The child, HOPE HIMSELF, Jesus the Christ, our Messiah, has been born. And as we peer into a new year, filled with possibility and opportunity, *for Zion's sake we will not keep silent and for Jerusalem's sake, we will not rest.*

Scripture tells us *the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.* And like Anna we will *praise God and speak about the child to all who are looking for redemption.*

We gush over the babies, and then we get busy.

Love those babies in the sanctuary and love everybody's babies out in the street. Because God does not dwell in the temple. Scripture describes Jesus, the temple himself, in the garden, by the well, next to the bed of the very ill, or on a fishing boat. By the Little Pantry, in choir practice, in the Clifton Ministry kitchen, and at Kim's Laundromat.

We work together, as a community, toward our dream that each child, that every child, be nourished, educated, and protected. That every child receives healthcare, opportunity, and respect. That every child be told about the Messiah and then be shown the love and justice that Messiah requires of His disciples every day.

Through the story of Advent, God tells us clearly: heaven on earth is possible. Through Christ all things are possible. The brightness of the star, the appearance of the band of angels almost blinded those shepherds keeping watch on their sheep at night. What did the angel say to those shepherds? I bring you GOOD NEWS. Peace on earth and good will toward all people.

Empowered by that holy light, gushing over that baby, we will focus OUTWARD. And as we move into this new year, we are the many who will not keep silent. We are the many who dream ... and then do.

Amen.