

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

---

The Reverend Elizabeth H. Doolin  
Sunday, December 27, 2020

---

### **Luke 2:22-40**

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, “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.” And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.” There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

---

The Reverend Elizabeth H. Doolin  
Sunday, December 27, 2020

---

Jerusalem. When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

### **The Word of the Lord.**

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, “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.” And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

---

The Reverend Elizabeth H. Doolin  
Sunday, December 27, 2020

---

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Today is the first Sunday after Christmas. We have welcomed baby Jesus into the world, singing Christmas carols, and worshipping in the Christmas Eve services from the comfort and safety of our homes. We have given and received gifts and spent time with relatives perhaps in many ways - on Facetime calls, shouting through the glass of storm doors, wearing masks and visiting six feet apart, or simply tolerating the people in your household who you have seen every day nonstop for the past 10 months. Well, by the time you are watching this, that will be the case. Where I am now, recording this sermon, it is December 21st, and due to the safety precautions needed for worshipping in a pandemic that is seeing cases at an all-time high in Tennessee, we are recording in advance of the Christmas holidays. So, I want to be upfront with you all about the dissonance that I'm feeling right now between where I am in writing and preaching this

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

---

The Reverend Elizabeth H. Doolin  
Sunday, December 27, 2020

---

sermon, and where we will be by the time this worship service airs on your device.

I am sitting in this strange place where Advent, Christmas, and the post-Christmas season all are melting into one. The anticipation, the joy, and what comes next all together. The now, and the not yet.

In some ways, I think this tension is appropriate for this text, and perhaps for the end of 2020 as well. In today's passage, we see that Mary and Joseph are also in the middle of this strange in-between time. They have experienced the glory of the birth of Christ and are now at the temple to offer the traditional purification sacrifices for their child. There they encounter Simeon and Anna, who offer prophecies that continue to proclaim the glory of Christ's entry into the world. And yet, he is still a child. On the one hand they have experienced the beauty of this miracle, and on the other, they are waiting to see the fulfillment of these prophecies as he ages. They too are in the now, and the not yet.

As I write this, cases of COVID-19 continue to skyrocket, especially in Tennessee. Over 300,000 people have died in the United States alone, and 1.6 million worldwide. And, at the same time, the first vaccinations are being distributed to healthcare workers across our country, and to people around the world. As I drove to Idlewild this morning I saw two FedEx planes flying into Memphis almost side by side; while I can't be sure what they were carrying, I imagine it's very possible that they were carrying vaccine shipments to be distributed across the U.S. It's incredible to see healthcare workers that I know personally getting the vaccine, which makes this bit of

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

---

The Reverend Elizabeth H. Doolin  
Sunday, December 27, 2020

---

hope feel especially real. But we know there is a long way to go before everyone can be vaccinated, and before widespread immunity is achieved. All of us are experiencing the pain and the hope of the now, and the not yet.

And in the response of Simeon to Jesus at the temple, we find hope and pain intermingling. Simeon proclaims that “his eyes have seen your salvation, prepared in the presence of all peoples; a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory for the people of Israel.” And at the same time, he prophesies that Jesus’ entry into the world will lead to the falling and rising of many; there will be opposition, discontent, and the revelation of truth that will transform the world; something so powerful that he describes it as a “sword that will pierce your soul.” While we do not receive the specifics of what the prophet Anna said upon meeting him, we hear that she praised God upon Jesus’ arrival at the temple, and told people about him - specifically, those seeking the redemption of Jerusalem. She too recognized that this child would lead the way into new life.

2020 has been a year of unveiling truths, truths that if we sit with them long enough may have pierced our own souls. The pandemic has revealed the economic disparities in our country, and the ways in which so many were barely getting by before COVID-19 hit. It has also shown us the inequities in healthcare along racial and socioeconomic lines. The murders of Ahmaud Aubrey, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and many, many others have revealed how deep the roots of racism run in our country, and how far we still have to go in making sure that black lives really do matter. 2020 has been a year of reckoning; even in an age of persistent misinformation, I do believe it has been a year of painful but important truth-telling.

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

---

The Reverend Elizabeth H. Doolin  
Sunday, December 27, 2020

---

And in the midst of this reckoning, we have also seen glimmers of hope. We have seen people from all walks of life protesting injustice and taking action. We have seen the first round of vaccines distributed to healthcare workers. Several of our own congregants have worked tirelessly on MICAH task forces, seeking equity justice for all in Memphis. Many of you have also served at the mobile food bank, helping to fill the gaps that leave so many hungry.

In predicting that Jesus will be a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and a glory for the people of Israel, Simeon proclaims the vast nature of Christ's love - that it is intended for all, not just religious insiders. Despite this message of Christ's inclusive love, Simeon also predicts that opposition and division will arise: "this child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed." It is precisely Christ's message of a radically inclusive love that will arouse divisions amongst those who hear it.

There is a stirring apocalypticism to Simeon's words. And by apocalyptic I do not mean Left-Behind series, people sucked into the sky getting "raptured" talk; but Simeon's words echo the apocalyptic writings of Hebrew Scriptures like Isaiah and Daniel, that speak to the destruction of the old sins of greed, pride, and prejudice in order for God to do something new in the world.

We see God doing something new through the incarnation of Christ, in which boundaries that were thought to have existed between God and humanity, and people with one another, are shattered. This expansive welcome is what will lead to the falling and rising of many. But in a way I think this falling and rising is something that we all

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

---

The Reverend Elizabeth H. Doolin  
Sunday, December 27, 2020

---

must take part in: that in falling, we might die to the old ways, and in rising, be reborn in Christ, and experience the transformation of new life.

Despite the end of the advent season, we are still in a period of expectant waiting. We are waiting for the day when the majority of US citizens, and people around the world, have received the COVID-19 vaccine, and we can feel safe gathering again. We are waiting for change and justice in our social and political systems, and an end to the violence against people of color. And at Idlewild, we await the transition to our new Head of Staff, David Powers, and what his leadership might bring to this congregation.

But in our waiting, we also celebrate the birth of the Christ child, and the redemption offered to through his presence. Kimberly Bracken Long, professor and scholar of worship, writes that in the gospel of Luke, “redemption is not only possible, but has already happened. Because of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, the holy continues to break into our lives, to bring us closer to the completion of creation and the already-and-not-yet reign of God.”

Though there are many things for which we continue to wait, in Christ Jesus we have the promise that God is with us, and that our God intimately knows the pain and joy of what it means to be human. We have the promise that God is actively at work in the world and transforming everything as we know it. And we are invited to take part in this transformation. To accept the gift that is new life in Christ Jesus and allow our souls to be pierced by this redeeming love. Thanks be to God.

May you go in peace, participating in and witnessing to Christ’s transformative love, now and evermore. Amen.