

“Prophets in This New Age”

1st Sunday after Christmas

Virtual Liturgy

December 27, 2020

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Iao United Church of Christ

Galatians 4:4-7

Luke 2:22-40

Poem: “Sermons We See” by Edgar

*I’d rather see a sermon than hear one any day;
I’d rather one should walk with me than merely tell the way.
The eye’s a better pupil and more willing than the ear,
Fine counsel is confusing, but example’s always clear;
And the best of all the preachers are the men who live their creeds,
For to see good put in action is what everybody needs.*

*I soon can learn to do it if you’ll let me see it done;
I can watch your hands in action, but your tongue too fast may run.
And the lecture you deliver may be very wise and true,
But I’d rather get my lessons by observing what you do;
For I might misunderstand you and the high advise you give,
But there’s no misunderstanding how you act and how you live.*

*When I see a deed of kindness, I am eager to be kind.
When a weaker brother stumbles and a strong man stays behind
Just to see if he can help him, then the wish grows strong in me
To become as big and thoughtful as I know that friend to be.
And all travelers can witness that the best of guides today
Is not the one who tells them, but the one who shows the way.*

*One good (person) man teaches many,
(people) men believe what they behold;*

*One deed of kindness noticed is worth forty that are told.
Who stands with men of honor learns to hold his honor dear,
For right living speaks a language which to everyone is clear.
Though an able speaker charms me with his eloquence, I say,
I'd rather see a sermon than to hear one, any day."*

Today, God communicates through two ancient prophets – One named Simeon, righteous and devout on which the Holy spirit rested on him. He is not destined to see death until he has seen the Messiah. Beloved community, here we have somewhat of a parallel to what is to come when Jesus gets baptized by John coming up in a few Sundays. Except here, we do not have a dove coming down from a cloud or John hearing the words of God proclaiming Jesus as the son of God. No, here we have Simeon and of all the male children that he has previously conducted the purification ritual upon – he will suddenly know when the Messiah will be presented to him for purification.

Today, as it was the tradition, Joseph and Mary present Jesus for purification. As it was also a customary tradition, an offering of a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons are brought as part of the sacrifice. But here is another parallel that I find fascinating. If you recall from a few Sundays back in Advent when the angel Gabriel visited Mary. When she learned that she was chosen by

God to be the mother of the Messiah, she busted into a song we know as the “Magnificat.” Fast forward to today, Simeon now praises God with, maybe not a song like Mary, but rejoices with:

“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.”

You see beloveds, Simeon has already begun to express God's love for ALL people – both Jews and Gentiles. God's light has come for all people through this infant now being presented for purification. God is following all the current traditions of that time so that the people of that time will know that scripture is being fulfilled. The words of the prophets of old is being realized by Simeon.

Another thing I find fascinating. How Joseph and Mary always seem to be amazed when things are being revealed about their son, Jesus. The angel Gabriel visited you and told you about the “good news” Mary, and then another angel told Joseph not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife and to flee from Harod’s army – and now, at purification, you are amazed? After everything, the

angels have revealed to you, amazed at what Simeon has to say. “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel.” This statement on its own merit gives way on many ways of interpretation. Through a vulnerable child, no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, this child has come for you. All are included in the purification of this child. People will oppose the “good news” that this child will bring. People will oppose the great work this child is destined to do. The wolves in sheep’s clothing will be exposed. Those who are first will be last. Those out in the margins will be first. And Mary, get this Mary, when they pierce his side, it will feel as if you got pierced as well. The “good” that this child brings will be challenged by the pious and elite.

The other prophet God communicates to us today is through Anna. We can only assume that she witnessed the purification of the child Jesus at the temple. Of course, we know she could not participate in the ritual itself, but she gave witness about the child to anyone who would listen. She became the vessel through which God would use to prepare the people of the “good news” to come.

Beloved Iao Church, God uses us like Simeon and Anna to spread the “good news.” God wraps us in the Holy Spirit of this

season to bring the “good news” to people in need. We are incarnated for our time – for our own Bethlehem journey. If God entered human history and herstory in Simeon and Anna's time why not in our time as well? The power of our ideas, our words, our way of being the church for our time can be extremely powerful news for people who need some sense of hope. We are given a great opportunity to lead by our example through our House Churches. Like the poem above:

The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear,
Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear

As prophets for our time, why can't God use us and have us lead by our example? As the poem above continues “I'd rather see a sermon than to hear one any day.” Amen!

This Christmas to me gives us – Iao Church a chance to lead by example for our time. To continue to make history and herstory for our time. By words and actions is to act out in “being” the church. I want us, the collective us, to act out the “good news” for our time. If you are extrovert, introvert, male, female, young, old, abled body, not so abled body – wherever you are on life's journey- ALL have something to contribute.

So beloved church, let us close with this. Do not be afraid to act out in being Iao Church. Like the Christ child that was presented today for purification, let us continue to grow in our faith – be strong on our beliefs and let us allow the spirit of God to grant us wisdom. For in doing so, like Mary, may we find favor with God.

Amen, Amene, Ashe, A-ho, and Alleluia.