

The LORD says, “Do not fear, I will help you...”

It is said that “the blessings of God are new every morning”. Every new day brings a sign of God’s blessing, God’s goodness.

Certainly, this was the experience of Simeon and Anna—old folks—who were in Jerusalem. But they encountered a young couple; they encountered a newly-born child—namely, Jesus. And the consequence of it all was that they were inspired; they also had a message to proclaim; they were called, in the case of Anna, to a different sort of activity than what they had been doing before.

Now, when it comes to encounter with a younger generation, we hope that there is some continuity between our generation and a generation that follows. The values that we hold dear, we hope that a succeeding generation will also hold dear.

What we find, in the case of Simeon, when he met Jesus was that— Well, first of all, he had been given an intuition that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah; and then, we are told, he was guided by the Holy Spirit to be in the temple just when Jesus was there. His hopes—what he counted as important—were certainly affirmed very strongly in this new-born child, Jesus. In fact, he said,

“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation...”

So, inspiration came to them by this encounter with Jesus. And of course, inspiration is what comes to us, as well, as we follow in the way of the Lord—inspiration in the sense that new vistas are opened to us whereby God may inspire to us to new action, new understanding, and the like.

Now, much of this inspiration, of course, comes through other people, sometimes. Other people can be a source of inspiration to us, because of their attitudes, because of the way they conduct their lives. They show us that it is important to be oriented towards the future that God has for us, and to be attuned to what is happening in the world, and what new things God is bringing about.

As a young minister, a number of years ago, in the second pastoral charge I served, one person inspired me, in her own way. This was a person—Margaret McKellar—who, at a certain age—she would live with her son and daughter-in-law, but at a certain age—she decided that was no longer of much value around the farm, and so, she decided that she would go to the nearest old age home, which, in that area of Petrolia, is known as Twilight Haven (of all names). So she signed herself in to Twilight Haven; and that was before the days when everyone had their own washroom; she had to go down the hall to the washroom. But this woman read two newspapers a day; and, on her wall, was a collection of pictures of her family, her children and grand-children. And she followed attentively what was going on with them, and with the wider world.

So here, to my mind, was an inspiring person, because, even though she was in a nursing home, she remained connected—really—to what was going on around her, and to her family.

Well, we also can learn from people like her not just be insular, but be oriented to what is going on in the world and the future, what God is bringing about in the future. Now, when we

read the newspaper, we do not always read something that is very inspiring, it is true. But God, in Christ, through other people, sometimes awakens in us a realization of what new understandings, what new positive things, are happening which God is bringing about through his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now, Simeon, in his encounter with Mary and Joseph and Jesus, also had some solemn words to say to Mary. He said to her, “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.”

So, we have just heard that Simeon said, “Master, you are dismissing your servant in *peace*.” Now, we hear that a *sword* will pierce your own soul, too. So what is that sword piercing person’s souls?

Well, we might recall in the book of the Acts of the Apostles how, on hearing the words of Peter preaching to them, people were “cut to the heart”. There is the sign of that sword. It’s a sword that calls us away from a manner of life which is focussed on self, and rather orients outward to God and to our neighbour.

And, sometimes, that is a difficult process. It involves repentance, on our part, a real change of heart, in order to have changed attitudes and behaviour.

Again, it’s sometimes other people who may be instruments of this sword piercing our heart. There may be people who speak the truth to us in such a way that we are not just hurt, but we also take it to heart, and learn from that, and become better people as a consequence.

And I hope that each of us has some person or persons who can do that for us, who speak to us, and tell us maybe something about ourselves which could be improved upon. I think, in my case, our daughter is quite good at that. She can tell me *stuff*, in her own inimitable way, and cause me to reflect on it, and perhaps make some change, as a result.

Other people, in any case, can be instruments whereby God’s word, God’s intent for us, can be taken into ourselves—sometimes with difficulty, sometimes requiring repentance, a change of direction in our lives.

Now, we learn in this passage that Anna—we shouldn’t forget Anna, who is the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. As we are told in the passage from Luke, “she never left the temple, but worshipped there with fasting and prayer, night and day.” And then, “at that moment, she came and began to praise God, speaking of the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.” So prayer and fasting changed to become “speaking to others, to those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.”

God calls us, sometimes, to new endeavours, new projects. And, what better time of the year to think about new projects than right at the beginning of the calendar year, January 1? Here is an opportunity to reflect on where God may be leading us, what God might be calling us to—out of mere routine into something new, something whereby God may be served in a new way, and our neighbour blessed.

Now, over the Christmas holiday—another anecdote here—our son-in-law suggested that we try curling. He knew something about curling. His father was on the team that won the bonspiel for Newfoundland. This was many years ago; it happened, I believe, in Saskatchewan.

So Michael, our son-in-law, knows something about curling; and, of course, he has grown up with it. But we had eight of us; and he was the only one who knew anything really about curling.

But we followed his suggestion, and we contacted George Calder, thanks to a connection from Bob Duncan. George had the rink ready for an event of his own, and he involved us a little earlier on in the afternoon. We had a great time. We will not necessarily become members of the Brownsburg Curling Club. However, we certainly enjoyed the activity; and one of the participants said, “We should curl at least once a year.”

There was another person motivating the rest of us to do something different and new, and we enjoyed it. And so, we are thankful for those people who encouraged us along the way.

So, in this new year, may you receive inspiration with respect to a new understanding of your life and the world that God is active in, through—sometimes through younger people, sometimes through older people, all generations. In the new year, may we all be open to necessary changes that are required of us in order to be more fully God’s people in the world. And may we also be open to new endeavours where God may enable us to more fully make his presence and blessing known in the world.

May the New Year be a time when we can truly say, “God’s blessings are new every morning.”