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FMC Reedley  
Luke 2:22–40  
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“Holy Waiting: Freedom in our Lifetime”

This Advent, we have been focusing on the idea of waiting. Waiting with the Israelites yearning to return home, waiting in eagerness, waiting for peace, and waiting for the story to start. Today, Jesus has arrived in the temple, coming into God’s presence for a welcome to the world party. I am sure Joseph and Mary are breathing a sigh of relief that Jesus has made it through those most delicate days of life. But so are Simeon and Anna, who have also been patiently waiting for decades for a light of hope to come to save Jews and Gentiles alike.

Please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing to you, savior of the whole world.

As we celebrate the baby Jesus. I’ve got babies on my mind. No, I’m not having a kid, but a few of my friends are. And like Simeon, I cannot wait for them to be born.

As I wait, I cannot help thinking about how in this sanctuary, we celebrate important life transitions. We gather here to mark these moments as especially special or holy. Think about it. When someone is born, we gather for a child's dedication or, in other traditions, a baptism. We mark graduations by giving the graduates gifts of bibles and quilts. When we meet someone we’d like to bond with for the rest of our lives, what do we do? We go to the sanctuary and ask our friends and family to bless this new bond. When we depart from this world, our friends and family gather in the sanctuary to celebrate and mourn. Can any of you think of any other important life transitions that we celebrate here?

Whatever transition we celebrate here. What joy it is to witness a transition!

Well, today’s passage is about Joseph, Mary, and Jesus gathering at the temple for Jesus’s beginning of life and their beginning of being parents. I think the parents among us realize that this is a big deal. So of course the Hebrew Bible records a ritual to celebrate the occasion. Come to the temple and bring a sheep to sacrifice, but if the parents are too poor, they may bring two turtle doves or pigeons.

You may be wondering what sacrifice is. Do they just throw the birds on the fire and burn them to charcoal? No! A sacrifice to God was a party. It was one of the few times that Jewish people in Jesus’s day ate meat. Mary, Joseph, the family they invited, and the priests would all eat those pigeons as part of the ritual. This sacrifice party was a time to celebrate a successful birth and a

healthy child. And during the party, Simeon joins in, sweeping the Baby Jesus into his arms and pronouncing a great blessing on Jesus.

This is a part of the music I spoke about last Sunday, telling us, the readers, what Jesus will be like. He will be a divisive figure. Some will think him their savior, a messiah who will rescue them. Others will see him as a threat to their power. Jesus will upset the status quo, which is good news for the lowly and bad for those in charge. So Jesus may be going through a life transition, but Jerusalem, indeed the whole world, is going through an era-transition. By God's grace, we live finite lives, going through several life transitions, but have you ever experienced an era-transition?

What joy it is to witness a transition!

You may be looking at the title of today's sermon, Freedom in our Lifetime. This is a quote I could not get out of my head when I read Simeon's words about being able to depart in peace. Freedom in our lifetime is a quote attributed to South African politician Nelson Mandela. This was the dream for black people in Apartheid South Africa, that they would not need to wait another lifetime for the apartheid government to end. Not to replace white supremacy for black supremacy, but for all South Africans to have one united government with equal rights for all.

As I keep saying, Jesus will turn the world upside down. Bringing up the lowly, tearing down the mighty, so that all chains are broken, and we can all live at peace. I hope you all here can see that in the gospels and also in our world.

That it is a joy to witness a transition!

Whether a life transition or an era-transition, today's passage is a celebration. This church has witnessed some small era-transitions. The peace center fighting for Jesse Morrow Mountain and the end of the Iraq war. Last year, I cried tears of joy when I witnessed the era-transition of our denomination, Mennonite Church USA, from one whose guidelines would not accept gay and lesbian members to one taking baby steps toward affirmation. What era-transitions stick out in your mind?

Today, our hearts are with Ukraine, where many of our ancestors came from. Our hearts are in Bethlehem, where Jesus came from. I, at least, am waiting for an era-transition, the end of war, a complete peace. I hope to see it within my lifetime. Not just the end of rockets, but Russia no longer lusting for its old empire, and Israel and Palestine no longer fighting over water and land. What a wonderful era-transition that would be! A light for revelation to the gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."