

Christmas 1C, 2012

Text: Luke 2:21-40

Title: The Bucket List

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I'm sure you're familiar with the term, "Bucket List." It's a list of things you want to be sure to do before you "kick the bucket," before you die.

What sort of things do you have on your bucket list? What do you absolutely want to be sure and get done before it's too late.

Are there places that you want to go? Take a trip to Europe or Asia, somewhere tropical? Are you trying to see all 50 states?

Is there something adventurous that you'd like to do? Go skydiving or SCUBA diving, run a marathon, climb a mountain or learn to fly an airplane?

Is there a big project that you want to finish? Write a novel or restore a car, go back to college and finish a degree?

Or is there something more personal that you'd like to do? Is there someone that you've been fighting with and you need to make amends? Is there some issue in your life that you would like to resolve?

When people start to get older, especially around birthdays or the end of the year and they look back over their lives, they often ask these sorts of questions. How have I spent my life? What should I do with the time that I have left?

In the Gospel lesson for today, we meet two older people who see Jesus when he comes to the temple.

The first is Simeon. And Simeon has one item on his bucket list. Simeon wants to see the Messiah, the Christ, the promised one.

Now this is a big deal. This is bigger than climbing Mount Everest or taking a cruise to Hawaii.

People had been waiting since the days of Adam and Eve for the birth of the Messiah. People like Abraham, Moses, and David had all watched and waited for Him. Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel had all written about His coming. For thousands and thousands of years people had been watching and waiting and praying for the Messiah to come. Millions and millions of people had died without seeing this event.

But Simeon was different. The Holy Spirit had promised Simeon that he would not die until he saw the Messiah. Simeon believed that promise. He came to the temple, led by the Spirit and that's where he found Jesus, the Messiah.

And when he found Jesus, he took Him up in his arms and he said, "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace."

Simeon is ready to die. The last item is check off his list, there's nothing more that Simeon needs to do, because he has held Jesus in his arms.

Jesus has come to save all people- Jews and Gentiles, and because of Him, we all have peace with God.

When Jesus was born the angels sang a song of "Peace on Earth." That peace is not just between people, but between you and God. Because of sin you were born an enemy of God. But Jesus came to make peace, to reconcile you and God.

He does this first through the incarnation. Jesus is both God and man. In His very flesh and blood the human and the divine are brought together. Jesus takes your humanity purifies it with His divinity, reconciling God and man in His body.

Jesus also makes peace through his death for you. Jesus' death pays the price for all your sin, and so God has nothing against you. You are completely innocent in His eyes. You are no longer God's enemy, but a member of His family, His beloved son or daughter.

You can die in peace, because you, too have held Jesus.

Often when people near the end of their lives, they aren't worried so much about what they've accomplished, whether they've done everything they wanted to do, whether they've met every goal in life. I've never been at someone's bedside who's told me, "I really wish that I had taken that trip to Tahiti," or "I have so much regret that I never got promoted further at work."

When people reach the end of their lives, most often they wonder and worry about how things stand between them and God. Even if they've been faithful all of their lives, even if they are people you'd look at and say, "Oh, she's got nothing to worry about." Even those people still have sins that nag them, they worry if they've done enough or believe strongly enough.

The only way to have peace when you die is not to look to yourself and any list of accomplishments that you've done, even if it's service to God and to the church, don't look to what you've done, but look to Jesus Christ. You hold Jesus Christ as His word comes into your ears and down into your heart. You hold Jesus Christ when you eat and drink His body and blood in the Lord's Supper. The same body that Simeon held in His arms is placed on your tongue today.

And so when the Supper is over we all join to sing Simeon's song, "Lord, now let your servant go in peace." You have peace with God because Jesus Christ has died for all your sins and gives

you this forgiveness in the Lord's Supper. Nothing that you've done, no matter how big or small, can stand between you and God, because Jesus has died for it all.

If you should die today, this week, or this year, you can die at peace with God, because your sins are forgiven.

On Friday morning I was called to Gordon's bedside.

Gordon lives in the same home as Betty Baker. When we started doing services there over three years ago, he was there at the first one and has been back nearly every time since. After getting to know Gordon we found out that he was a lifelong Lutheran, but his church had closed and he had not received the Lord's Supper in many years. So I began bringing him communion when I came to see Betty, and the other pastors who came for the services would care for him as well.

Gordon's health has been declining, and I got a call Friday morning letting me know that he might not make it much longer. So I headed over to see him, and we went through the service of the commendation of the dying. Gordon was having trouble staying away and couldn't really respond much, but after his sins had been forgiven, we had read God's Word and prayed, we concluded with these words of Simeon, "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace."

Those words will be prayed at your bedside, too, when your time comes to depart this world. You will have peace with God, not because of anything that you've done, but because of what Jesus has done for you.

And there's one more time that prayer is prayed for you. At the end of the funeral service, the pastor comes down to the casket, clothed in the white pall of holy baptism, with the light of Christ still burning from the paschal candle, and together we pray one last time, "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace," before the closing collect and benediction.

And then you will be laid to rest in peace until the last day comes, and your body is raised, and you see and hear Jesus once more, with Simeon and Anna, Mary and Joseph, and all of God's chosen ones, holy and beloved.

You might get everything crossed off your bucket list before you die, and then again you might not. Don't worry, be at peace. You have peace with God through Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem, presented in the temple, pierced with a sword, risen in glory for all people.