

My name is Simeon. You may or may not remember me because my part in the Christmas story is only heard once every few years. There are no Simeons in your Christmas Sunday school pageants, nor Annas for that matter. Both of us were faithful people of God who lived in the 1st century. Every morning we would see each other at the great temple of Jerusalem, only nodding to each other from a respectful distance because the law forbade anything more.

We had grown up under the law believing that in keeping it, we would know God; but try as we did, we both felt that something was still missing. We remembered the words of Isaiah 43: 18-19:

Do not remember the former things,

or consider the things of old.

I am about to do a new thing;

now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

I will make a way in the wilderness

and rivers in the desert.

so we came to the temple waiting to see God's new thing. We really didn't know what we were waiting for, but believed that God was doing a "new thing".

Anna and I waited for years, spending every day in the temple until all of our clothes were saturated with the unique smells of that place; incense and perfumed oil , the smell and soot of many olive oil lamps along with the other smell of fresh blood and burning flesh of sacrifices. Anyone passing by us on the street knew exactly where we had been!

Even though you and I are separated by 20 centuries of time, and your world is much different than the one that I knew, you know how I felt. Today is your New Year's Day, an agreed on artificial division of time on which you turn away from the things of old and begin to look toward new things. What new things may be out there for you?

Maybe new things will come in the status of your health or relationships. Maybe new things will happen to your children/ grandchildren; as they will face the challenges life will give them. Maybe the new thing will happen in an election year. I've listened to the debates of those seeking votes and can only say that I thought the Pharisees talked too much. Ooy! Maybe new things for you will come in events elsewhere in your chaotic and restless world. Maybe you are waiting for things that will impact life in your job or retirement. I wish I could offer insights into what the New Year holds for you, but I do not know.

Your waiting, like mine, is always the wondering about the future, trying to peer into a cloudy crystal ball that doesn't provide many answers. You wished each other a Happy New Year last night and this morning, because no one knows what happiness or challenge the new year will bring. We may be clear about our past, and sure about our present, but we cannot know our future. Anna and I waited for years, and over the years, hope diminished. Sometimes we felt foolish waiting for something that would never come, but finally God's new thing came.

It happened on a day in the temple that began predictably. Anna and I took our usual places and, after praying, started watching people. There were some who wanted all to know they were there; their prayers more drama than plea, while others knelt in humility, prayers murmured to God alone. Sadducees and Pharisees looked with a

judgmental glance at anyone who didn't seem as holy as they thought they were. People numbly bought approved animals, offering them to bored priests.

In the middle of all this came a young couple, unsure peasants who seemed overwhelmed by the sights and sounds of the temple. Dressed in the plainest of clothes identifying them as among the poor, they carried a new baby and the obligatory offering of doves. It was the baby who caught my eye, and as I glanced over at Anna, it was that baby who caught her eye too. We both rushed to the child the mother and father looked terrified, unsure of our intentions.

I grabbed the child first and lifting him up, began chanting in a loud voice, praising God's answer to my waiting. Anna added her praise to mine because God's new thing had come as a peasant's child; an answer of hope and promise. We both knew, we just knew, that in this child everything was changed. We left the temple that day and never returned because we knew that God was not just in the temple but now was truly Emmanuel; God with us. We knew that in whatever new things life would bring to us, God's love would surround us.

While you cannot know how kind or difficult the New Year will be, you can trust that God's love shadows you wherever you go. May you find in it a centering peace and a hopeful courage on this New Year's Day and on every day. I now slip back into the shadow of death, like a ghost of Christmas past. You still have a moment in time in which to live and experience all that life can offer. Live with courage and grace, convinced that there isn't anything in the days ahead that you and God cannot get thought together. What began with that child I held in my arms continues. May His peace be yours!

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