**Depart in Peace**

Based on [Luke 2:22-40](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk2.22-40)

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Christmas 1

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The purpose of the Christian Church is to prepare us for Judgment Day, to prepare us to give an account of our deeds to the Lord, to prepare us to “meet our maker”-- In a word, to prepare us for a good death. Jesus says, “**If the son sets you free you will be free indeed**.” Freedom is knowing you can die at any moment, and being okay with that, being ready for it; and not only that, be eager and excited for what’s to come. And so, everyone faces death with this concern, What have I done? What have I left undone? And all have peace who have faith in this promise, all has been fulfilled, completed. finished in the death and wounds of the Saviour Jesus Christ.

It was my privilege this year to administer baptism to a dying elderly woman. She had recently been admitted to the ICU and diagnosed with terminal cancer. **Immediately, I was notified by her daughter, a member of the church, and I went to the hospital and we talked.** She said she had believed and found consolation in the Lord Jesus her whole life, but she was not raised in the church, and simply never received baptism. She had been meaning to receive baptism for many years but--and she put it this glibly--“I never got around to it.” Death is a departure, and when you see it coming you make sure everything’s in order. You make sure what you will be leaving behind is looked after, and you make sure you have all you need for the journey.

Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus to God’s Temple in Jerusalem. And there they met a man named Simeon. And when Simeon saw the child, he spoke or sang these words that are so beautiful they have been sung as a canticle in the church. Simeon says,

Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.

His words are a song, the that has been sung since the earliest days of the church: the Nunc Dimittis. Nunc Dimittis means “now dismiss” because Simeon is saying the lord has dismissed him. In short, Simeon is saying “I have seen the Lord’s salvation in this child, I can die now.” Verse 26 says, “**It had been revealed to [Simeon] by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ**.” Everythings in order, my life is complete, I can die now, I can rest in peace.

This is why in the Roman Catholic church, Divine Service is called the Mass, in particular the Lord’s Supper is called the Mass. It comes from the same word missa, dismissal. **It’s because once you have received the Lord’s Supper, you have received Christ himself and all his blessings and now you’re ready to die.**  Seriously, you are ready to go out into the world and in your life in your various calling you are ready to sacrifice yourself for your neighbor. Husbands are to love their wives and give themselves up for her. Wives are to submit to their husbands. Children are to obey their parents. Workers obey their bosses and if you literally die along the way, all is well because you have been dismissed by the Lord and you left his sanctuary in his Peace; prepared to enter His glory.

Someone once said that the purpose of Christianity is to prepare you to die well. And that's true freedom. There's a great effort within Christianity today to make the church relevant to our modern world and way of thinking. **We are very much in the age of therapeutic religion; that is to say that the purpose or function of religion today is to make your life happy and full.** And so we talk about healthy people being well-adjusted or having self-esteem accepting themselves for who they are that sort of thing. And that's all fine and good-certainly christians should be happy. **How often are we told to rejoice, to give thanks, to be content all of these things**? But the modern technique is a cart-before the horse way of doing christianity. It's expecting to get the milk without buying the cow. Sure christianity is good therapy, but that's because the most well-adjusted person is the person who's ready to die. The person who's ready to depart from this world, not necessarily eager or wanting to, but prepared to meet the Lord in paradise has peace. That person is truly free.

Jesus says in John 8, "**Truly, truly, I say to you everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**" The forgiveness of sins we have on account of Christ Jesus; that he earned for us on the cross; that he gives to us in his body and blood; this forgiveness sets us free. If you have all sorts of things left undone, you are not ready to die. You are anxious and troubled about many things. **But the Good news of Jesus Christ is that he has done all things; he has fulfilled all righteousness, he has performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, and all he is and has he gives to you freely, packaged in your baptism and delivered to you.** That is the Peace which passes all understanding, to know that it is well with your soul that nothing is left undone. Now you are released, dismissed to freely serve your neighbor.

That Jesus Christ has done all things, won all things, accomplished all things, crossed all the t's and dotted every i, this is an important aspect of the atonement won at the cross. Jesus says, "I tell you, not one jot or tittle of the Law will pass away before all is accomplished." And so we know why Jesus had to be baptized. John the Baptist says to Jesus, "**I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?"** And Jesus said, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Jesus says, elsewhere, "I did not come to abolish the law but fulfill it." And on the cross, before he breathed his last and gave up his Spirit he said, "It is finished." What is finished? Everything. Nothing is left undone. The Law of God is fulfilled, and Jesus is dismissed and departs in peace.

This Christmas season, we are to remember that this fulfillment that built up to that famous word of Jesus from the cross *tetelestai*, "It is finished", began from his infancy. He was circumcised on the eight day, according to the Law of Moses, and Our gospel lesson for this first Sunday after Christmas tells of two things that Jesus’ family had "to get in order" that Jesus might fulfill all righteousness**. First, Mary needed to seek purification, and was to do that forty days after giving birth to a son. According to Leviticus 12, she was to offer a lamb and a pigeon or turtledove for sacrifice at the temple, though God made an exception for the poor, who could offer simply two pigeons or turtledoves instead.** While at the temple, Mary and Joseph also brought their forty-day old son to be consecrated, that is to set him apart before the Lord by presenting him at the temple as our Old Testament lesson today says. So our gospel today tells of (1) the purification of Mary, and of (2) the consecration/presentation of Jesus.

The fulfilling of God’s Law is important to the faithful, and under the Old Covenant, there were many Laws to be fulfilled. And it’s good to keep perspective here. **Because it’s common for us to think that the Old Testament laws were burdensome because there were so many of them, and because they were so nuanced**. There was proper procedure to be followed meticulously and of course, to fail at one point would cause doubt and uncertainty.

It’s common to think that it’s better today, under the New Covenant of forgiveness and grace because there is less law, less procedure. And it’s true, circumcision, purification, consecration all of these things are fulfilled in Jesus and now applied to us in one simple rite, the right of baptism., the washing of water with the word, the washing of regeneration of the Spirit, one simple rite one ceremony carries with it all the grace of God; and we inherit it simply as a birthright for being God’s true children with a full promise of forgiveness attached to this wonderful sign of baptism.

Yes, the new covenant of Christ is far superior to the old. But that has nothing to do with procedure. Yes baptism is less complicated, but it can still be administered improperly, which adds doubt which keeps us from departing in peace.

I shudder to think of what the state of the church will be like in 20-30 years if our Lord doesn’t come before then. **Even now in liberal churches, children are being baptized wrongly, for instance, “in the name of the mother, daughter, and the eternal spirit,” or some such other unbiblical formulae.** Baptism is a law in the sense that you can do it wrongly, and in the years to come it will cast doubt, “**I was baptized when I was a child, but was it done properly**?” Once God’s people needed to be meticulous to follow God’s protocol; today it seems, the protocol is minimal, and yet we invent ways to break it. And the devil shall be pleased for all his hard work; for when one's baptism is brought into doubt, we cannot depart in peace and certainty of having received it. And to think, Satan fools unfaithful stewards to do this in the name of freedom and of casting off the constraints of ceremonies and laws. Lord, have mercy.

Because of the “gospel”, the new covenant, we are free from the demands of the law, but that is so much more than simply freedom from the shackles that conform us to rules and rites and procedures. God is still a God of order, not confusion. God's rules are not burdensome, and Faith still delights in the law of the Lord. **Perish the thought that Mary and Joseph rolled their eyes in having to journey all the way to the temple to make a sacrifice for purification.** God's Word said childbirth made her unclean, and Mary believed it and acted accordingly. So too, God gave the remedy for that uncleanness, and Mary believed it and obeyed. And there is only cause for rejoicing when God attaches his promise to a visible sign, be it a sacrifice, a sacrament. How foolish it would be to reject his treatment in the name of freedom.

An illustration, If the doctor told you had cancer, but then said they’ve discovered a new treatment that will cure it, only you need to travel to Calgary to receive the treatment and undergo a certain procedure, you wouldn’t roll your eyes and say “**C’mon doc, why do I have to drive two hours to Calgary, and then go through some elaborate procedure, some ritual some treatment**?  **You and your ceremonies doc, I just have faith that if God wants to heal me he will. I don’t need to go through any ritual called treatment, I have the Gospel and I trust God to handle it apart from any legal demand to go to Calgary."**

Mary trusted God to handle her disease of uncleanness, and she did so precisely by believing in the treatment he prescribes, the sacrifice at the temple of two turtledoves. Mary and Joseph believed that the firstborn son born of Gods people belongs to the Lord, and so they presented the baby Jesus in his Father’s house, in the temple, because faith delights in the law of the Lord.

And the scripture says, “**when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.”**  Jesus family visited the temple because they had to get these two things in order, and once that was fulfilled, they could leave, trusting that they had faithfully remembered God’s covenant and the proper blessings would accrue. Knowing that the will of the lord was done, they had peace. And the scripture assures us that God is faithful to his promises, for it says the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.” Notice how the scripture connects the fulfilling of the law with Jesus being filled with wisdom and having the favor of God upon him.

Freedom is not doing whatever you want; freedom is not being free from doing what anyone else says, including God. No, freedom is knowing that, no matter what happens you cannot lose what’s most important because it’s already accomplished. In the world we chase after wind. All is vanity. It’s like that hallway that goes on forever, dog chasing his own tail, seeking your heart’s desire only to find that the harder you seek the less you find and the more exhausted and worried you are, and the more you feel is left undone. Freedom is not chasing your own tail. Freedom is knowing that all is accomplished in Jesus Christ, in his death on the cross he has conquered death and hell and in your baptism through faith, you are prepared to depart this life in peace, for you have received all he accomplished.

Lord now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word.