

Lesson: Galatians 4:4-7
The Gospel: Luke 2:22-40

First Sunday of Christmas
December 27, 2020

“We’re In This Together”
Sermon Preached by Rev. Jacquelyn Pagel
American Lutheran Church of Sun City

Grace and peace to you, sisters and brothers. Let us pray. Good and gracious God, as we gather together in person and digitally, here and around the world, we praise you for the blessings that abound, for the opportunity for good cheer, family and friends; and the opportunity to know that we are loved by you no matter what. In Jesus name we pray. Amen

Merry Christmas! It is official, now we can celebrate from here out until epiphany. Candy canes and hot cocoa, or truffles and the beverage of your choice, whatever it takes for you to know that it is indeed Christmas time and that we are blessed. I am blessed to be here with you this weekend. I want to thank Pastor Lowell and Pastor Judith for having me. I am Pastor Jackie Pagel, the Associate to the Bishop for Candidacy and Faith Formation in the Grand Canyon Synod. I get to be on the staff with Bishop Deborah Hutterer and her team.

This morning I want to tell you about the great team I work with, all the fun we have, and share some good news from our Gospel reading. First I want to bring you greetings from the Lord of Grace Lutheran Church down in Tucson, the last church I was able to share good news with. As the new calendar year comes in and I get to continue to introduce myself around the Grand Canyon Synod, I’ll take greetings from y’all to the other churches. Yes, I said y’all. That is something that I took away with me from being a student at Southern Seminary in South Carolina, and even though I grew up in Los Angeles, I have learned that y’all comes in mighty handy around here sometimes.

Announcing to the congregations where I’ve been and where I’m going is just a small way for me to remind us that we are indeed in this together. The Grand Canyon Synod spans from Saint George, Utah, all of Arizona and then Southern Nevada, which is mostly Las Vegas. We are part of something bigger than ourselves. Bishop Deborah Hutterer and the strategic plan that was put together by the Synod Council is just a small way that we get to implement some tools to help us live into our faith of being together. The main foci of the Synod strategic plan is communicate Jesus, connect people and create possibilities. Be sure you are signed up to receive the Synod newsletter by going to GCSynod.org. You can learn about all the great things we have going on in the Synod, the schedule of everybody on staff, and then also get a copy of the newsletter that comes out once a week. Your Synod office is the liaison between church-wide in Chicago, the congregations across the country and the ELC around the world, the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Let me tell you about the great staff I get to work with. Many of you have met and worshiped with Bishop Deborah Hutterer, the first female bishop in the Grand Canyon Synod. Some of you know Pastor Miguel Gomez-Acosta, the Director of Evangelical Mission and the Bishop's Associate for Vitality and Sustainability. He makes sure we know what opportunities are available through church-wide to keep our congregations vibrant and thriving. At the front office is Miss Theresa Thornburgh, she is the Office Administrator and Director of Events. There is Mr. Clint Wasser, our Director of Finance; he has all the answers. There is Dr. Jerry Kingston who supports Bishop Deborah by running the mobility database to help place roster leaders within our Synod. Mr. Brian Flatgard is our Director of Communications; he keeps us looking good. We also have Miss Molly Gary and Miss Solveig Muus working part-time. Molly is administering our 3e grant that we are working on with the Rocky Mountain Synod, and Solveig is developing advocacy networks so we can be better about being the church throughout the Grand Canyon Synod and in the world.

I handle all things candidacy, that is from a person saying they're interested in becoming a deacon or a pastor until they are ordained, the paperwork, the interviews and the handholding. I also get to go to camp formation, our youth gathering and visit with our campus ministry sites across the state. I get to connect with people in the un-traditional ways that people decide they want to be leaders in our church. I am responsible for leadership development in this part of the country. Everything we do as the Synod staff is to encourage the almost 100 congregations across our Synod to get to know each other, work together and be sure to put Christ first in our lives. Instead of trying to bring together the people in a congregation to live out their faith in a neighborhood, I get to work with all of our congregations across the Grand Canyon Synod to live into our faith into the world. Instead of me preaching to the almost 100 people who worship with me at Trinity Lutheran Church when I was the pastor there over in northwest Phoenix, I get to share the good news with you and the pastors and communities around our Synod.

From the gospel this morning, I get to tell you that the good news is Simeon took him in his arms and praised God. At verse 27, "Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple and when the parents brought in the child Jesus. To do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God saying, "Master now you are dismissing your servant and peace according to your word for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

A few years ago when this story came up for us, I preached about old people, I preached about how fortunate we are to have elderly among us and if it wasn't for their prayers, their hard work, their money, we wouldn't be here. The text speaks to me of how fortunate we are to have the blessing of our elders. Now that just might speak a little differently in this community, because in some ways I am talking about your prayers, your hard work and your money, but I am not calling you old. I might have been able to get away with my sermon from back then because you guys didn't hear it. I still

hear the same good news today. Simeon took him in his arms and shared the good news with Jesus, with Mary and Joseph. This is a baby to look at.

Instead of talking about age, let us just bask in the moment that Simeon highlights for us. We are here now and everything is going to be all right. Our world is much different than it was this time last year, much different than the last time I preached on this text. COVID has changed everything. Now we are keeping everyone away from everyone else. Now we're waving from the windows and Zooming all over the place. Now our elderly are us, because we all feel older than we were a year ago. This pericope, this segment of Gospel speaks to all of us.

The writer of Luke is the only one to put in this little snippet of life after birth. This is the only place where we get the story of Simeon and Anna. As is truly Luke, these 20 lines are chalked full of information. We learned that Jesus was definitely being raised Jewish. He was brought to the temple according to the law. We are reminded that he was born into a poor family, because they could only afford a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons. We learned that Mary and Joseph understood respect to the end because they let strangers, all people that they didn't know, take their baby and hold him. We in this peace with the good news, learning that the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom and the favor of God was upon him.

The good news is we are blessed when we relish the news of our elders, we are blessed when we rely on one another, when we struggle to keep one another safe, we are blessed to be a blessing when we do what we have to do to be sure to remember our mask, to be sure to remember to wash our hands, to cut each other a little bit of slack because it is just not the way it used to be. We are blessed. The good news is we are in this together and Emmanuel, God is with us. This text gets to remind us that wisdom is more than an age thing, wisdom is a faith thing, wisdom is the arms that wrap around us and remind us to praise God no matter what. No matter how old you are, no matter how young you are, may we all see the world through the eyes as one such as Simeon and be blessed. Amen