

First Presbyterian Church
Marianna, Florida
Sunday, December 9, 2007
Sermon by Huw Christopher, Pastor

Scripture Readings: Psalm 145:9-21
Luke 2: 22-35

Sermon Title: “Claiming God’s Gift of Jesus Who Comes to Meet Our True Desires”

Psalm 145:16: You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.

As we hear that prayer and song of Simeon as he looks at the baby Jesus it is clear that for him here in this baby is to be found the One for whom he had been waiting, the Promised One of God. In the baby Jesus his true desires had been met. But even as he sings out in praise to God for all that God has done it is clear that he recognizes that not everyone will come to appreciate all that God has done in sending the long-expected Jesus. He tells Mary and Joseph, “this child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed.” We cannot know how much Mary and Joseph may have understood of what Simeon was saying as he looked at the baby Jesus. Today, though, as we hear his words and look back on the life of Jesus we see how prophetic his words proved to be. In love God may have sent Jesus to have come to meet the true desires of all people. But for so many people what he said and what he did just did not seem to meet what they determined were

their true desires. For many of them as they thought about God's Messiah who would bring glory to the people of Israel they looked for one who would be like their great warrior King David who destroyed their enemies and raised the people of Israel up as a great nation. They saw that their true desires could be met only at the expense of other people. They failed to appreciate that God is the God who wants to meet the desires of all living things, and that these desires cannot be met just for one nation at the expense of other nations. Earlier at his birth the angels had proclaimed to the shepherds that they had good news for all people, not just one group or one nation at the expense of all the rest. At his birth the angels had sung of "peace on the earth, goodwill to all, from heaven's all-gracious King." It was indeed because Jesus sought to live out this good news in word and in deed by showing love and concern for all people that the inner thoughts of so many people were revealed as they rose up in opposition to him and sought to destroy God's messenger of good news because they saw the good news he proclaimed not as good news but as bad news.

What happened then is still as true today. The good news that the angels proclaimed to the shepherds is still good news only to those who see that in the gift of Jesus God is saying, "I have not given up on this world. I still desire for all people to know that for which I created the world good in the first place, and made everyone equally in my image, male and female, of every race and people, to live as one community. (based on the Brief Statement of Faith of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) God's desire for this world, for which he has given us the gift of Jesus, is that all people might come to know that one community in which all are treated equally, in which all are loved, and in which all people live in the rest that comes from the assurance of being loved and accepted. This is the one community of love in which no one is made to suffer in order that others might get ahead, and in which all reach out with a greater concern for the needs of others than for their

own. What Jesus came to do can be seen as good news only for those who are ready to affirm with Charles Wesley, “Israel’s strength and consolation, Hope of all the earth, Thou art. Dear desire of every nation. Joy of every longing heart.”

As we think about what it means to claim God’s gift of Jesus who comes to meet our true desires we have to ask, “Do we see these as our true desires? Do we see these as the true desires God has placed in all people?” As we sing, “I want to walk as a child of the light, I want to follow Jesus,” do we see his love for all people as the love we should seek to emulate as his followers?

In the midst of a world where so many people seem to reflect such differing wants and desires and often use violent and hateful means to try to accomplish them it is easy to get weary. As we prepare to celebrate God’s gift to us of Jesus who comes to meet our true desires how often in all of our weariness at life in this world as we know it do we need to stop and hear again the song of the angels at his birth, and to find that hope and that encouragement that his coming brings as it assures us that God has not given up on this world but is still at work seeking to enable all people to find in Jesus, “the dear desire of every nation, and the hope of all the earth?” Let us hear again the song of the angels as it is reflected in the words of Edmund Hamilton Sears, in what has been termed, “the first of the ‘carol-like hymns from the pens of American poets.’ (The Presbyterian Hymnal Companion, page 44) His carol of the angels’ song is found at No. 38.

Hymn of the Angels’ Song at the Birth of Jesus No. 38

Carol

“It Came Upon a Midnight Clear”