

Paint your life with peace

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[0 : 00] Our reading this morning comes from the Gospel of Luke and chapter 2. So Luke chapter 2, I'm going to read from verse 21 to verse 40.

On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived. When the time of their purification according to the law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.

As it is written in the law of the Lord, every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of doves or two young pigeons.

Now, there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts.

[1 : 15] When the parents brought the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God saying, Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace.

For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be spoken against so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed and a sword will pierce your own soul too.

There was also a prophetess Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She was very old. She'd lived with her husband seven years after her marriage and then was a widow until she was 84.

She never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

[2 : 38] When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong.

He was filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon him. Amen. This is the reading of God's word. I'm going to look together now at the second chapter of Luke and the verses that I read from earlier.

When my children were a bit younger, we made several trips to Disneyland Paris. And the only time I've ever been on roller coasters was at Disneyland.

And jump on, slightly anxious but quite happy. And then once I'm halfway through the ride, holding on thinking, Man alive, what am I doing here?

This, I thought, was supposed to be fun. My head's bouncing about like a bagatelle or a pinball. My stomach's in my mouth. And there's a little bit of pleasure.

[3 : 44] But there's a lot of just like, man, don't really love this. And roller coasters. Some people love them. Lots of people dread them.

Sure, 2020 has felt a bit like a roller coaster for most of us. Hurtling along, pausing briefly at the top of a cliff before crashing downwards again.

And as we get into the Gospel of Luke and begin to read what Luke has written for us in these first couple of chapters, there's a little bit of that, I think, in the way that Luke is setting up the story of the

life of Jesus.

That actually it's not going to be all sweetness and light and a smooth road and an easy path. There's going to be a lot of variations, a lot of up and a lot of down.

The way of Jesus turns out to be a hard and bumpy road. The way of Jesus brings suffering and darkness and hard things.

[4 : 50] And that's life for all of us in this world, I think. And it's life even for those of us who are Christians. Things will always be harder than we expected in ways that we didn't even predict.

But the good news that Luke wants to sow into the depths of our thoughts and our hearts is this. That in the turmoil, there's light. There's salvation.

There's hope. Because at the centre of all of that and at the centre of the story is Jesus. He is the calm in the storm. He is strength for the weak.

He is rest for the weary. He is joy for the broken. And so Luke's invitation as he draws us into the story of Jesus is to become part of that story ourselves.

To intertwine our lives with the life of Jesus Christ himself. To become followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so as we read through chapter 1 and chapter 2 of the Gospel of Luke.

[5 : 56] And we read the narratives around the birth of John the Baptist. And the birth of Jesus. And the shepherds and the angels. One of the things that Luke is doing is giving us the portrait of a king.

So that's one thing I'll think about with you for a little while. The portrait of a king that Luke is painting. But then he's also painting a portrait of the people who follow the king.

So that's the second thing. There's a portrait of a king. There's a portrait of his people. And then I'm also going to just sort of think with you a little bit about how we then look at this picture.

And paint our own lives with the love of Jesus. So we've got the portrait of a king. Luke is framing a picture for us of the coming of the king of kings.

The long-awaited saviour of Israel. At the beginning of chapter 2 he mentions Caesar Augustus. Who's organising a census of his entire empire.

[7 : 02] But Jesus is presented to us as a greater king than even Caesar. He's the king of kings and the lord of lords. He's come from heaven. He's the true king of the world.

And so we might think that this painting is simply going to be a painting that's full of grandeur. And magnificence. And majesty.

And power. But the painting isn't going to look that way at all, is it? It's a good painting. It's very accurate. Luke is somebody who's interested in representational detail.

Real characters. Real locations. Real geography. So there's a lot of realism in the painting. There's history. And fact.

But the colour palette. The colours splashed over the canvas. They're dark. In many places they're the colours of suffering and pain. This is not all warm Mediterranean colours.

[8 : 06] It's not a triumphalistic painting. The mood, the tone that Luke creates is different from that. And it's a painting that invites us in.

We're drawn into this story. The story of Jesus. With its sombre colours covering the canvas. And as we're drawn into the story of Jesus.

One thing Luke wants to say is. Brace for impact. There's going to be hard things ahead. I actually find this quite a difficult passage.

In some ways. And I think what always causes me pause. The bit in this passage that I always sort of stumble over. Are the words of Simeon.

To Mary the mother of Jesus. Where in verse 35. Verse 35. He says to Mary. A sword will pierce your own soul too.

[9 : 08] He predicts tragedy. Grief. Suffering. For Mary. I find that difficult. It rattles me. The picture that Simeon paints is of a long sword.

And he says this long sword Mary. Will pass through your soul. That does make me brace for impact. A mother's grief.

Over a lost child. Is heartbreaking. There is nothing quite. That will tear your heart. Like watching a mother. Grieve.

For her lost child. And that's what. Simeon is describing. That's what Luke's writing about. And recording for us. Luke's giving us an accurate.

And honest account of the life of Jesus. And into that life. Because of the honesty of the narrative. Comes this ominous note. Mary. Jesus says.

[10:10] You will suffer. Bitterly. Anguish of your soul. Because you'll see your own son. Facing an unjust.

And violent death. So Luke is already alerting us. Isn't he? That the portrait of this great king. The king of the world. Is astonishingly also.

A portrait. Of suffering. And grief. And rejection. And hardship. A king who will divide people. Some will love him. But many will speak against him.

And so Luke says. Be prepared. That as you follow the story of Jesus. You're going to come up against hard things. Sad things. Confusing things.

And dark things. And so as we enter the story of Jesus. And new at this Christmas. We need to be ready. For the hard things.

[11:11] Ahead. There's hard stuff behind us. Isn't there in 2020. And we might just be thinking. Give us a break. But life isn't quite like that. And there are also.

Not only hard things. Behind us. But hard things ahead. Hard things ahead. As we read the story of Jesus. And the gospel of Luke. But also as we consider. Our place.

In the story of Jesus. Or in the story of this world. So there's a portrait of Jesus. The king. And I said also. I wanted to think about the portrait of his people.

That Luke paints for us. So I haven't been at the National Portrait Gallery. For a long time. But it's down there. In the new town.

And all these amazing portraits. Of many great and different characters. From many different times and eras. And what Luke has done.

[12:07] I think in his gospel. Think about it this way if you will. Luke has created. A portrait gallery. Lots of different kinds.

Of individuals. That he pictures for us. Who become a part. Of God's people. And God's story. In this world.

Who become part of. His kingdom. So hanging on the wall. Of chapter one. In Luke's gospel. We have an old priest. Zechariah.

And his wife Elizabeth. And then their baby. John the Baptist. Also in the gallery. In chapter one. Is the painting of a young virgin.

And her fiancé Joseph. In chapter two. There are portraits of shepherds. Weather beaten. Scruffy. A bit dodgy looking. Shady. And then.

[13:03] Now in the same portrait gallery. In chapter two. We have Simeon and Anna. Elderly. Devout. And godly. Very different looking.

Kinds of people. From the shepherds. Simeon. A man who's been waiting. For consolation from God. Over many hard and difficult years. For him and his people. Anna.

A woman who buried her husband. While she was still in her twenties. And has been waiting ever since. For the redemption of Israel. Her city. So Luke provides these portraits.

Doesn't he? Of real life characters. Young and old. Insiders and outsiders. Urban and rural. Male and female.

Religious. Non-religious. Rich and poor. Jesus' family. In this story. They offer the sacrifice. Of devotion for Jesus.

[14:00] It's the sacrifice that. Poor people. Had to offer. And so. What we find in the portrait gallery. That Luke is. Is hanging all these pictures in.

Are. Such a variety of. Of people. And characters. And. He's saying there's a place for all kinds of people. In the kingdom of God.

And I wonder. Perhaps. If you can see your own picture. Hanging there. In the gallery. Of those who belong. To the kingdom of God.

Because. Luke wants to say. If you. If. If you want your story. To be part of. The story of Jesus. If you want. To. To. To go in that. Way. To follow in the path.

Of Jesus Christ. Then because. Jesus's story. Is dark. And tumultuous. Then. Our story.

[15:00] Will become dark. And tumultuous. To be a Christian. To be a follower of Jesus. Is not to take the easy way. It's going to be a lot. Tougher than it looks. From the outside.

We need to know that. Ahead of time. So that when the hard things come. We're not thrown. We're not discouraged. We don't lose. It's hard. Because understand this.

The lows. Will be lower. Than you could have ever. Anticipated. The tears. Of the Christian life. Will be more frequent. The hard things.

Will be so much harder. Now. We can grasp that. Because if we've read the gospels. And they're worth reading. If you haven't. We know that Jesus.

Says. Come and follow me. Take up your cross. To go. That's. You know. That's. That's. That's. That's. That's. That's. That's. That's. That's. That's. But still. That can't prepare us quite. For the shocking realities.

[15 : 58] That our own lives will present to us. Harder than anything. That we imagined. Yes. We know we're going to have to be patient. And persevere. And we imagine that this will go on for a while.

but perhaps we don't realise that sometimes it will go on year after year, decade after decade that some struggles will never leave us in this life.

That some things won't get sorted or just go away. That to be a Christian is often to live with hard things all the way to the end. A sword will pierce your soul, Mary.

She never got over that. To see her son crucified on a cross, she didn't move on, did she? There would be a wound and a grief in Mary's heart for all the rest of her life.

Jesus, exalted and ascended into heaven, he bears the scars of his suffering still. So to be a Christian is to take a hard road.

[17 : 10] It's to take a difficult road. Many spoke against Jesus and many speak against Christianity today. The ethics of being a Christian in the 21st century Scotland is challenging, isn't it?

Many speak against Christianity because of what the Bible shows us in terms of sex or gender or the beginning of life or the end of life.

So much of what we know the Bible to teach goes against what our culture holds as true or precious. So being a Bible-believing Christian in Scotland in the 21st century puts you out of step with the culture.

People will speak against what we think. But although we're out of step with the culture, the important thing is to be in step with God, to be following the way of Jesus.

So there is hardship. There are these sombre colours in the paintings. How do we find peace in the face of these hard things?

[18 : 20] If we're feeling battered and bruised by 2020 and fearful of 2021, where do we go? Well, I want to say this. Paint your life with the love of Jesus.

Cover your life. Cover your story with the love of Jesus. Paint your life with the love of Jesus.

Simeon prophesies and he says, My eyes have seen your salvation. To see Jesus is to see God's salvation. And when we see this, it makes our lives complete.

Because we know God loves us. And he loves us so deeply that he has sent his son to be our saviour.

This is our peace. Salvation is a big word in the Gospel of Luke. And now in Jesus, God's promised saviour is present.

[19 : 23] And so, Simeon has peace. Dismiss your servant in peace. That's a great message, isn't it? For 2020. It's a great message for us.

There is a saviour who brings peace. Luke paints his story. Not just with sombre colours. But he paints his story.

With words of love and words of hope. The love of the saviour. He loves us more than we could ever have hoped.

Or imagined. And this saviour is ready to receive us. He is the saviour who brings peace. In verse 14 of chapter 2.

The angels sang about the birth of Jesus and said, Glory to God in the highest. On earth peace to men in whom his favour rests. And now, again, this idea of peace.

[20 : 23] In verse 29. Simeon says, dismiss your servant in peace. Luke relents them this idea of peace. That God paints our lives with peace. Because we're so loved through Jesus Christ.

Luke's picking up the Old Testament idea of shalom. That Jesus brings a deep and enduring peace. A tranquility of mind and heart. A sense of harmony and well-being.

From living under the care and love of the almighty creator. Redeeming God in a world of tumult.

So, you know, we're painting a picture of this suffering king.

And we're also painting a picture of his people that involves hardship and suffering if we're going to go in the way of Jesus. But we're saying that at the heart of this picture, it's painted with love. It's painted with peace. And so I want to encourage you to know that peace yourself.
[21 : 28] Through knowing Jesus. Receiving Jesus and the salvation that he offers. And then living a life of devotion towards Jesus Christ.

It's very noticeable in these first two chapters of Luke and in this story that we read today. Of how devout the people in this story are largely. You know, Simeon and Anna are two very devout people.

Simeon, we're told in verse 25. The woman, Anna, is very old.

And we're told she's 84. And she never left the temple. But worshipped day and night. Fasting and praying. Lives of devotion.

Great artists need great technique. There's a precision to the beauty that they create. And there's a technique to the way that these people live, isn't there?

[22 : 33] As they paint their lives with the beauty of the gospel. With the beauty of the love of Jesus. With the beauty of the peace of God. There's a technique to what's going on.

Jesus' family, they're devout as well. They follow the practices of circumcision. Of dedicating the firstborn child. And of purification for Mary after childbirth.

The technique of their lives is to follow the law of God and the path of God. To go the way of worship. So every day their lives are bent towards God in worship.

This is the technique that allows them to live near to God. To paint their lives with the peace of God. Their minds and hearts are formed by scripture.

Their minds and hearts are strengthened through their knowledges of the promises that God has given in his word. They rest in these great truths day by day.

[23 : 39] They pray. They worship. And so these patterns, these techniques of daily and weekly worship. Carry them along through the hardships.

As the wind pushes against them. As the tides of sorrow and sin push against them. They're kept going. Because they're living in these habits.

These techniques of worship. Of prayer. Of scripture. 2020 was a year for new habits. The number of people that I see out exercising and running and walking seems to have risen a lot over the last year.

If I go up Blackford Hill now, there's so many more people up the top of Blackford Hill than I would have expected to see a year ago. More people exercising. More people out walking.

Habits have changed. Habits have changed. We've been forced to change the way we live. The way we spend time is different. The way we socialise is different. The way we work is different.

[24 : 44] The way we spend money is different. And in the midst of that, there's been an opportunity for new habits of worship. New habits of faith.

Of reading the Bible before you pick up your phone in the morning. Of praying three times or five times through the day. Of praying on your knees as opportunity allows.

Of praying with others, even if it's over Zoom. Early in the year, we thought about prayer a lot.

Adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication.

Adoration, acts, simple acronym to help us to pray. Techniques you can build into your life. To let you worship more.

On your own, with your family, with your friends. Lives of devotion. And devotion gives direction, doesn't it? It means you're devoted to this one thing.

[25 : 44] To this one great idea or cause. Jesus, as a firstborn child, was dedicated by his parents as a servant of the Lord.

And that's right there in verse 23 if you want to check it out. His life belonged to God and to his service. And so if you're going to follow the way of Jesus.

If you're going to make his story your story. Then our lives also become dedicated to the service of God. When we enter the story of Jesus, it becomes our calling.

Our vocation. Our life given to a new purpose and to a new destiny. We live to serve Jesus, to glorify him. We all have our part to play in this story.

We all have our part to play in God's kingdom. We all have our own part to play in this picture.

We've all got a role to fulfil.

[26 : 50] We're given gifts, both natural and spiritual. We're given resources. We're given opportunities that are unique to us. And so as you look ahead to 2021, I do hope that you're looking ahead with hope and anticipation because of Jesus.

That your life will be painted with his love and peace no matter the hardship of your circumstances. But I also hope that you're looking ahead with a sense of devotion and direction.

That 2021 will be a year to serve the Lord. To serve the King and his kingdom. To follow his call. To play your part in the work of the gospel. If you're a Christian, what does your Christian service look like in 2021? As we start the new year, it's quite often the case that we'll make resolutions, isn't it?

You know, and sometimes these are eat less, get fitter, save more. Quite often, very individualistic goals.

[27 : 59] But what are your goals and your longings for your relationships with family or with friends and church? What are your goals?

How will you play your role in painting this world more with God's love and peace? How will you bring more of God's love and peace to your home?

To your family? To your neighbourhood? To your community? To Cornerstone? Or to your church? What will the habits and techniques of devotion look like?

As you seek to paint these beautiful colours? How will you bring more of God's grace to the table? How will you make life more of a feast for others?

And I want to say only through Jesus. By following him. By feasting on him. By letting his love cover your life.

[28 : 59] So take hold of Jesus for the first time today. Or if you've been a Christian for a while or for many years. Take hold of Jesus anew.

At the end of one year. At the start of another. Get hold of Jesus. Devote yourself to loving, worshipping and following him.

Let me pray. Father in heaven, we do want to thank you for your word to us now. Bless it to us. Bring that change that we long for in our lives.

That goodness. That light. That hope. Paint our lives with love and peace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[30 : 01] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.