

Sermons at the Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Sermon title: Presentation of Christ in the Temple

Preached by Rev. Geoff Read on Sunday 3rd February 2019

Text: Luke 2:24-40

I. Introduction

Today is Candlemas, the last day of our season marking the birth of Jesus. The readings during this season have traced the pattern of epiphanies or disclosures in the life of Jesus, which have the effect of “disturbing the comfortable, comforting the disturbed”

Here we are at the point where the baby Jesus is “presented” in the Temple to fulfil the requirements of the Jewish law for purification after birth and dedication of the first-born son

As he arrives he is swept into the arm so of Simeon, a godly-man who had been promised by God that he would not die until he had seen the messiah - moved by the Holy Spirit he enters the Temple, sees the child and realises that this is the One

Simeon prophesies over the baby, he praises God with joy

But then the mood changes as he turns to Mary, he blesses the child but then: READ v34-35

There in the blessing is the familiar pattern: disturbance, comfort

2. Exegesis of 2:34-45

The background to this passage lies in the OT prophecies of Isaiah, 8:14-15, 28:13-16 and links esp to the phrase “falling and rising” in our passage

(See NT use of the image: Luke 20:17-18, Romans 9:33)

Isaiah is prophesying, explaining the forthcoming Exile – a disturbing of the Jewish people who have become “comfortable” and complacent in their relationship with God to the point of negligence

The Exile will be not only punishment but also a “wake-up call”

The image is of a massive stone, in the way,
God will be like a stumbling block for them, against which they will stub their toes

But Isaiah is also the prophet of hope, and so the same stone that can be a stumbling block can also be a foundation block, something solid on which to build for the future, however “disturbing” the present may be

This is the pattern of God’s activity

This is the pattern Simeon prophesies about, that will characterise the life and ministry of Jesus: READ Lk 2:34

Through the holiness of His life hearts were revealed
Through his actions of dangerous love, he was a sign, but one that others “spoke against”... and finally acted against in crucifying Him

But for those honest enough to face the “falling” there was always the invitation to “rise”, the offer of grace

What seemed a stumbling block turned out to be a foundation
Jesus did disturb the comfortable, but always then comforted the disturbed

3. Application

Can you think of a time when something/someone seemed like a block, but turned out to be a foundation?

Many today are looking for God

What is happening is a bit like a spiritual smorgasbord or buffet
There is an attitude of “pick and mix” in the spiritual marketplace

In particular the buzzword is “fulfilment”, what we might translate
“comfort”

And there is nothing wrong with that longing

But sooner or later, the Christian Tradition teaches, there will come a
disturbing, if this is a genuine spiritual search

There will come a point at which we come face to face with discontinuity
in our lives, the seeming contradiction or paradox, the gap between belief
and practice/experience, a point of emptiness that jars with the promises
of fulfilment

You cannot paper over the cracks forever

And the question is: will this be a stumbling block or a foundation

Will this point be the one at which we throw in the Christian faith and go
seeking comfort elsewhere

Or will it be the point of growth or foundation, the realisation that Jesus
“disturbs” out of love, reveals the apparent contractions of superficialities
In order to spur us on, to seek after a spiritual reality that is increasingly
really real, that has increasing depth, solidity and integrity

Such a moment is painful, bewildering and vulnerable

This is the pattern and purpose of Jesus’ ministry that Simeon predicted
That came true and continues to be true

Will we stumble or build?