

Mary and Joseph are in the thick of it. Forty-ish days after Jesus' birth, they travel into Jerusalem for both Jesus' ritual presentation to the Lord as the firstborn son of the family, and for Mary's purification ritual after childbirth. Saggy eyes and spit up stains, anxiety over how long ceremonies would take before the next feeding, their memories of angel visits promising them not to fear fade in the postpartum foggiess. These rituals they take part in as every Law-abiding Jew does, help them make meaning of this pivotal time, help them transition their identities from adult couple to parents.

With any life transition--be it parenthood or retirement--there is grief in letting go of what was, fear in the uncertain future, joy in the gifts of the present, and a re-grounding that takes time. Before the re-grounding and full transition happens, we're vulnerable and raw, insecure about who we are and what we're working towards.

This is the emotional muddle in which we find Mary and Joseph when Simeon and Anna find liberating hope in baby Jesus. They're amazed by Simeon and Anna's reactions. They're shook. Could this be a regrounding for them? Have they remembered their purpose in parenting the Christ-child, despite the obvious challenges ahead? If Simeon, a devout Jewish elder, and Anna, an elderly prophet, could find hope in their little baby who keeps them up all night, then surely Jesus is that Messiah the angel promised.

All of us may be going through some kind of life transition. It might be a new phase in parenthood or a recent retirement. It might be a career shift, a move, or changing relationships. We might be *in the thick of it* right now, but no matter where we are personally, we certainly are *in the thick of it* as a nation. Many of us are experiencing a transition where our faith in American democracy is crumbling. We expect that our elected officials have our best interests at heart. We expect that they'll seek truth. We expect that the Constitution's checks and balances will keep authoritarianism at bay and freedom at the forefront. But how can we trust this now after watching such an impeachment process? Of course, the Constitution was never really for *all* people. Our forefathers' United States vision of possiblity didn't include women or the poor, couldn't imagine people of color as whole human beings, and the colonies' cries for freedom from Britain was simultaneous to invoking Native American genocide. Our faith in our institutions was never on solid ground.

But when I turn to today's gospel, I see that Simeon was set free by his hope in a baby, not the religious institution which he was devout. He cared about his religion. He prayed when he was supposed to pray, participated in every ritual, paid his taxes, but his faith foundation was in God, not human institutions.

When he saw that baby Jesus, saw God breaking into the world--not through the Powers That Be, but in the most vulnerable of all--something shifted in him. *Let your servant go in peace*

*according to your word, because my eyes have seen your salvation. You prepared this salvation in the presence of all peoples. It's a light for revelation to the Gentiles and a glory for your people Israel.*

Simeon saw in the Christ-child, hope for the Gentiles and the people of Israel--meaning *all* people, not some. Both Simeon and Anna longed for the restoration of Israel, of all to be made right and well in the world. And although the baby Jesus gave them hope, those baby cheeks and snuggles sent them into praising God, sent them into feeling free right then and there no matter what chaos was surrounding them--and they knew the chaos, right? They were old and wise, they had seen it all! Where are we putting our faith and trust and hope this week? In a 243 year old institution, or in a God who created the earth about 4.5 billion years ago?

During one of the hardest times of my life, I was teaching elementary special education in Nashville, TN. I found myself in a chaotic moment where some of my students were transitioning from my class to their next period and a new set of students were entering my classroom. It was one of those early spring days--like what we're longing for right now--where the sun is out, flowers are beginning to bloom, and the children are exploding with joy because regular outside recess is now a reality. I had lost control of my students. They were running every which way, I wasn't sure who was in my class and who had left. I was at a breaking point, and frankly I barely knew who I was anymore and where I was going, but I knew that teaching there was no longer my calling. I took a deep breath in, ready to unleash my fury at my students' behavior, when little first grader McGyvan ran up to me and shoved a bouquet of freshly torn dandelions up toward my face catching me mid-breath. "Miss Heimach," he declared standing on his tippy toes, leaning against my legs, "These are for you!" I exhaled. "Thank you, McGyvan," tears welling up in my eyes.

Now, did little McGyvan transform the whole world in that moment? No. But he transformed me. God's salvation broke through my pain and found me. The gift of that special moment made me react to my students in a healthier way, helped me take responsibility for my role in how I would show up for my students even if I knew I'd be switching careers after that year. I maybe struggled as a teacher, but I was going to do my best and still look for joy and beauty in the midst of my rawness. I found God in a hyperactive child with a special taste in dandelions.

Baby Jesus set Simeon free at the end of his life, but oh it was just the beginning for Mary and Joseph. Surely, that day changed them, gave them more confidence as they faced an uncertain future, reestablished their foundation in God, fueling their faith. Here we go God, we got this! We got this! And so do we.

In the name of our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, Amen.