

Luke 2:22-32

After three days of Church in a row I knew I needed an exciting topic for you. Something to grab your interest. So I decided, what better topic to preach on than Old Testament Purity laws! Don't get too rowdy or I'll call the ushers. Exodus 13, which we see a glimpse of in our Old Testament reading, dictates that under the Old Covenant, in the Old Testament, all firstborn male children belonged to the Lord. They were his. So the mothers in the Old Testament didn't give birth to their sons but to God's sons. This law was a recognition that all things came from God and were rightly his – he knit them together in there, after all. And so even their most treasured possessions, their first born sons, well, they were given back to God. They were his.

Now as any mothers out there would know: You kind of like the children you give birth to. So, these faithful Israelite mothers would go to the temple and present their babies to God, and then they would buy them back from him. They would offer sacrifices to get them back so they would be their babies.

This is what Mary and Joseph did with Jesus. But it was all so incredibly more meaningful because this baby, Jesus, was *actually* God's Son. Not like all the other thousands of boys that had been born to Israelites. This child, Jesus, was the Son of God – conceived by the Holy Spirit – no funny business, no, just the power of the Word of God. Nonetheless, He was Mary's Son too, and being devout and faithful people they presented Jesus at the temple and gave a sacrifice to buy him back to live in their family. They gave two turtle doves - the cheapest sacrifice offered. But I don't think Mary and Joseph were "cheap," no, but faithful even though they weren't rich. Jesus did not just come for the wealthy, no.

But don't miss the twist here. All throughout scripture God talks of how he will redeem his children. To redeem is to buy back. And, again, he promises he will, just like Mary and Joseph and all the other families that presented their babies at the temple, he will buy back his children. But that leaves us with a few questions. First of all, who are his children? And secondly, who is God buying them back from?

If God owns everything and made everything why in the world would he need to buy us back? Can't he take anything he wanted? He's God! Well, yes he can. But just because he *can* have everything, doesn't mean he *wants* everything. And it gets down to the dreadful reality of who we are. We are sinful people. We are unclean and impure. And while we clean up and put on a happy face, I know as much as you do that we are ugly. We have done sinful things and we have thought sinful things we have wanted sinful things. But God doesn't. I've said it before. God wants you, but without the sin.

And since we are too easily tempted by sin, to get that insult in there, to spread that rumor, to take advantage of someone, to take the dishonest money, since we are too easily tempted by sin, God has to pull us out of it. Because we can't beat the sin, he has to do the fighting for us. Since we kind of like the sin, which just goes to show how bad it is – yes, admit it, we actually like the lust, the drunkenness, the rumor spreading... So God has to rescue us from ourselves. And since we are too poor to pay the price for that, God has to buy us back.

But he does not pay with money, no, that is worthless to him, that's just something else he made. He pays the price, just like Mary and Joseph did to buy back Jesus -

with blood. Because that is the only way to answer for sin. Happy thoughts don't cut it. Saying your sorry doesn't cut it. When there is sin – there is punishment. When there is sin, something has to die, something has to shed some blood.

Are you starting to see how serious this is? God doesn't want a bunch of half-decent people in heaven. Because that would mean God turned the other way at sin and let some of it go. And if he is truly good how could he let sin go free? How could he let the robbers get away with it? How could he let the murderer's get away with it? How could he let us get away with it?

And so God demanded that blood be spilled. The blood of two pigeons was shed to buy back Jesus. The blood of bulls was shed to show that God's anger was not upon his children... But the price was too high. It was too high for a million doves to pay. It was too high for a million spotless lambs, or a million of the finest bulls. Because our sin was too great. The debt we racked up was laughably large, seriously it makes the US government's debt look like spare change. So the beautiful twist we hear about in today's gospel reading is how the blood of two turtle doves was shed to buy back Jesus who in turn, would grow older, and He would shed his blood to buy back all of God's children, once and for all.

Because his blood was not an animal's. But the blood of true man and true God. His blood had no stains, or impurities of sin. His blood was worth it all, it was so precious to the Father because it was the blood of his first born, but there for eternity, only begotten, Son. And he gave that sacrifice to buy back from sin all of his children.

Which brings us back to the first question. Who are God's children? Brushing up on our Old Testament again, we remember God's children were the children of Abraham who he chose to be his people, the Israelites. But even then it was never limited to just them. The prophets and the covenants went out to the nations. Others were brought in to worship the true God. And in our reading today we see that God's promise was for all who believe. For Jesus is "a light for revelation to the Gentiles," that's you and me and all those on distant shores.

So all with faith in Jesus, regardless of their heritage or country, can know they have been bought back by the blood of Jesus. All those baptized in his name are his Children who He gave it all to save, there are no second rate children of God. And yes, you, you are God's child. So we can all sing the words of Simeon later in the service proudly. Because our eyes have seen God's salvation, not because we looked on the baby Jesus at the temple like Simeon does, but because he has come to us in Word and Sacrament. We can say we depart in peace because God is no longer angry at us, our sin has already been punished on the cross. Fear not, you too are God's children and the Christ child grew and shed his blood to buy you back forever. Amen.