

- Sermon: The Fullness of Time

Scriptures: Luke 2:25-32; Galatians 4:4-7

Sunday, December 31, 2023 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- Intro. This sermon is for those followers of Christ who feel frustrated with themselves, who feel their imperfections acutely and wonder what will become of them. They struggle with this life, and feel that if they were better Christians, they would not struggle so much, or that their struggles and frustrations indicate that they are poor excuses for Christians. The purpose of this sermon is not to tell you to stop struggling, but to struggle with hope. Christ came at the fullness of time, and the results of His coming affect us to this very hour.

- Set the Stage: What happened in Luke, in which a godly man knew that he had seen all that he needed to see in this life.

As recorded in Luke 2, Joseph and Mary came to the temple in Jerusalem, and two people met them. One was Anna, a prophetess who lived near the Temple. The other was Simeon, a godly man who learned from the Holy Spirit that he would see the Messiah before he died. He recognized that the time had come, and that this baby was the one. His beautiful prayer reflects a life that has reached its purpose, and is full.

- The apostle Paul in Galatians uses the phrase "fullness of time", which describes an opportune time for eternity and the temporal to intersect. So it was with the birth of Jesus. Historians have noted that the Empire of Rome built an extensive road system, Greek was a multinational language (somewhat like English today) and that Jewish synagogues all over the empire had popularized the notion of a single, supreme God. It was the perfect time for Christ to come.
- I was originally focused on the phrase, "fullness of time", thinking that there are many moments that are like the "fullness of time" for God to act, speak and do in our lives, but I found that my focus changed as I wrote the sermon. We may have our own little "fullnesses of time" in which the Holy Spirit completes a special work in our lives, but we live, in a broad sense, still in the fullness of time, and have since the birth of

our Savior. But I found as I pondered these texts that my attention drifted more and more to one of the results of what happened in the fullness of time.

- Adoption

That result is our adoption when we submit to Jesus as Lord. Because of this we are offered adoption into the family of God. God is not a distant, severe Judge (without Christ He is) but is a dear and tender "Abba" Father, a "daddy." We invoke this privilege every time we pray the Lord's prayer, which begins with "Abba", "our Father." Because of this adoption we have the Holy Spirit available to us, the very down payment of heaven. Because of this we have a God in our midst who is able to do exceedingly above all that we ask for think, and is working in us to do so. (read Ephesians 3:19-20). We are heirs of God, and not slaves, and to be "adopted" is to be accepted. We often confuse our need for growth for unacceptability. We don't accept ourselves very well. We should still strive to grow and learn and be better, but we are to do so with hope, not frustration and despair.

- I once heard a martial arts instructor describe the skill he taught his students not as an ability to fight, or even to defend oneself in case of attack, but so the person trained in this art would be able to "run with confidence". While we are not running away from someone, the course of this life is still compared to running a race, and we can run with confidence because this adoption means that God offers to us all that we need to run well, and to live wisely as servants of Christ. 2 Peter 1:3 tells us that we have all things pertaining to life and godliness. Because of the adoption that came at the fullness of time, we have all we need.

- Conclusion

We're like the godly man in Luke, in which we have all that we needed in this life. The birth of Jesus came at the fullness of time, and with that birth came that life, that death and that Resurrection. Because of the fullness of time we have adoption into the family of God, and that means the Holy Spirit who works within us far beyond what we can imagine. We still need to work on ourselves, to strive, to run the race, but we can do so with hope.