

ADVENT MEDITATION
LUKE 2: 22-40
GRANT HAGIYA

“The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.” Luke 2: 40

Remember for a moment: When someone affirmed you, not for something you necessarily did or performed well, but affirmed you for who you are – your personhood? If has been too long, or you never had that happen, call or email me, and I’ll do that for you!

Now, think of how such an affirmation made you feel. Isn’t that the most special of feelings, this being affirmed. Because it so special, why don’t we do this more often?

In the Luke text for today, the infant Jesus is brought to the Temple, as is Jewish law to be presented to the Lord, and to be blessed. What a beautiful ritual! While there at the Temple, an unusual thing happened: A stranger to Mary and Joseph, the devout Simeon has a Kairos moment in that all of his life he has been looking for the Messiah, and upon seeing Jesus knows instantly that he is the Christ, and blesses first, God, then Jesus and finally Mary and Joseph. Also, the prophet Anna, who lives night and day at the Temple sees the glory in Jesus, and again praises God and the child, and then spreads this news to all she encounters. In this Scripture, Jesus is thrice blessed: First by God, then by Simeon, then by Anna.

Because of these blessings, the text ends with this account: *“The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.”*

In some ways, Jesus became the Christ through these blessings, and countless more that would come his way.

We have a chance to do this very same thing by blessing and affirming those we come into contact with every single day. Growing up in the local church, I can vividly remember all the times people would come up to me and affirm me, mostly by saying, “have you ever considered going into the ministry?” I would always put them off at the time, but cumulatively these blessings added up, and as much as I wanted to run away from this calling, God was directing me ever so cleverly toward the ministry.

Now I was also blessed with many options of what to pursue after college: I had an opportunity to go to law school, I thought about the FBI academy and finally centered on getting an M.A. and then Ph.D. and teaching at the graduate level. I was enrolled in a graduate program in Speech-Communications, when God intervened. The summer before I was to enter into that graduate program, I went to be a counselor at a UMC summer camp, and I was swept away by that ministry. The Dean of that camp, Rev. Peter Chen said to me, “Why are messing around with that kind of career? Why don’t you come to LA, and I’ll get you into seminary, and give you a job as a youth pastor.

Now, I never did anything in my life on a whim – everything was always well thought out for me, but for some reason, I said: “Okay.” My plan was I was only going to do this for year, check it out and then go back to my graduate program, as I made arrangements for delaying it a year. Well, one year turned into three years and I ended up graduating and taking my first church.

As I think back to why this all came to be, it comes back first to God and God’s affirmation, and then affirmations from my pastors, mentors, and all of you who became the Simeons’ and Annas’. Never underestimate the power of affirming and blessings those who you meet on a regular basis!

Let me close with this: At the end of one of our annual conference sessions in the Pacific Northwest (Remember these?), two young teenage girls came up to me, and said, they would like to become Bishops of the church. I affirmed them and blessed them, but then asked: “Why would you want to become a Bishop?” One of them without missing a beat replied: “Well, we see what you do up there, and we can do that!” “For sure,” I said, as they really could. I know someday they may fulfill that goal, but it all starts with God’s and then our affirmations!

Who can you affirm and bless this coming week!