

Instant gratification is the desire to experience pleasure or fulfilment without delay or deferment. It is embedded in our psychology; humans have an instinctive tendency to seek pleasure and avoid pain. So, what would give you immediate satisfaction or quickly attain a sense of happiness or contentment right now, this morning in church?

Possible answers are... please shout out answers ..... modern day life tends to encourage us to focus on satisfying our immediate desires without thinking this instinctive drive- but we know life is not like this (our real desires are not so easily met).

Today we reflect on the lives of Simeon and Anna. Simeon, is a “righteous and devout man” who is looking forward to a time when God’s plan of salvation for Israel will come to fruition and, he has received an assurance from God that he would not die before he saw the Messiah. Anna is described as a prophet, an elderly woman who is widowed and who lives in the Temple, “worshipping there with fasting and prayer night and day”. (Luke 2: 14-end). Simeon is guided by the Spirit to go into the Temple, and both he and Anna encounter and recognise the baby Jesus with his parents who are visiting, in order, to offer the sacrifice of turtle doves required, by the Jewish law, to mark the birth of the first born son.

What can we learn from this? Does it mean that we all need to be constantly in the church building or fasting and saying prayers night and day? No, but this account gives us much wisdom to take away.....

Focussing on Simeon and Anna:

- In a time when God’s people were downtrodden insignificant members of the Roman Empire, and the better of colluded with the enemy, Simeon was given an assurance by God/ God directly communicated to Simeon a promise and he believed and held onto it.
- Anna held onto her reading of the scriptures; both of them knew them well.
- There was a lot of waiting and trusting and more waiting on God and more trusting in God.

- There was not a lot of detail on exactly what was going to happen- the how and the why, but – they knew as much as they needed to know to believe and wait for God’s messiah, their Saviour.

This wonderful story tells us a lot about what it is like to live **a life of faith.**

- The story tells us that often there are no quick solutions or easy answers as to how life makes sense. This can be hard- especially if there are stumbling blocks to our having faith and developing it. Or when we feel like we have lost our faith, we might say we cannot get in touch with the presence of God- it feels like God has gone AWOL. Or again when we are facing sorrows, illness and other difficulties, we may desperately feel we need more answers not mysteries. We might have to wait and trust, sometimes for a long while until things become clearer or we understand more, or we don’t understand at all but receive an assurance from God either from the Holy Spirit or through a heavenly angel, or an earthly one as in another person of faith from whom we gain support.
- Anna and Simeon keep holding onto the belief that God is faithful to his promise of salvation. They understand that part of God’s care for us is that he has revealed to us what we need to know, there is a lot to be found if we continue to read the scriptures. We might find ourselves holding on and we don’t need to hold on alone- we can hold on with and to others. At any point in our lives, we can benefit, by praying with another person or having them pray. Simply praying with another person or having a prayer said for us by someone else, bringing something to God together can affirm our faith. Anna and Simeon held onto what life was all about through prayer.
- These wise characters make it clear that faith is lived rather than acquired through membership of a group, gaining a certificate of study or even getting a job! It’s not about working our way through a perfect understanding of the creed – the list of beliefs. Or even about observing all the religious ceremonies and practices- **It’s not just about the words or the doing- it’s about the being.** It is in the living rather than the detail

of religion that we encounter God. Faith means 'trust' - living and walking with God on trust: This is what Simeon and Anna did.

- The Christian Way is not about separating (compartmentalising) our lives in a way that reserves faith and spirituality for worship, prayer times, study and meditation on scripture alone. Being or living is cultivating an awareness of God in ourselves, in others and the world **and then, what we do and how we do it** flows out of this living and breathing. A life of faith is recognising that God is here- with us..

How might we put this into practice? One way is by finding prompts to remind us that God is present. Rocking up to church of course can help, a Sunday morning service, breathe, soul space, soul food meditation and mindfulness, nipping into church to light a candle. A space at home where you can relax and read a bible passage or read over the readings in the messenger again. A picture, a Palm cross, or a small icon of Jesus on a shelf, a card with a biblical verse on a desk, a candle with a flowering plant- so that each time we are passing the object or image encourages the mind to remember that God is with us.

How about making it the dog walk or your stroll to get the paper (if you still buy one) which prompts a conversation with God about your day? Why not have Grace before breakfast, said to yourself if breakfast is for one. Start the day with God and not just a bowl of cornflakes. Or how about saying grace before gobbling the sandwich at work. Praying the name of a single person each time you push the swing in the park? I'm sure that you can think of many more suggestions.

As a young child I often used to wonder where God was when I was on sitting on the toilet. As I grew older, I became very adept at keeping God out of whole areas of my life without giving it a second thought- we can attempt to keep God out of all kinds of things such as difficult relationships, the bedroom, finances, personal anxieties and regrets. We can even forget God is around when things are going well and we might be tempted into subconsciously feeling as if we don't need him very much. At times, it may happen because of embarrassment, feelings of unworthiness, disappointment and fatigue with life itself or even anger at God. Or sometimes we slip into thinking that God is

like us: we question how he can respond in love when we have not; or we fall into thinking that God is not going to be interested or bothered with something seemingly insignificant.

As the Son of God, Jesus walked this earth and so experienced human frustrations, concerns, family relationships, personal attacks and sorrows as well as joy, friendship and celebration. God is aware of all the dimensions of our lives and wants to share with us the experience of living- when we share, we become alive in the spiritual sense. Anna and Simeon understood this. They were spiritually alive so that their living, praying and waiting on God's promise led to their encountering the Christ child. It is when we are alive that we too will encounter Christ.

Melanie Seward