

One of the exercises our Sunday school teachers and pastors and other church leaders have taught us over the years, when it comes to reading our Bibles, is to identify ourselves with a character in the story. To ask ourselves the questions: which one pulls at our spiritual heartstrings most, how would *we* react in that situation, who most resembles *our* true character? And so, I wonder of all the children of God brought to life in the entire Scripture, if Simeon is more like us than we realize. Because Simeon craves something more, something more than just prophecies, something more than just words, something more real, something more tangible; just a little more God right in front of his eyes.

Now, of all the Simeon-like people I have met, there was a woman named Joyce, who still comes to mind. Joyce, too, always, and I mean *always* wanted a little more than the standard operating procedure during worship and adult Sunday school classes. I could always count on Joyce for, at least, one question afterwards regarding a Scripture reading or a hymn text or something said during a discussion on whatever topic in the fellowship hall after worship. And before she got to her question, without fail, she would preface it with, “You must think I’m crazy, but...” She

wasn't: she just wanted a little more, a little more God, a little more Jesus. She was just being the curious child of God that God shaped us all to be. And no matter how many times I assured her she was not crazy; without fail: "You must think I'm crazy..."

Now, if there was any time when I thought Joyce might have been a *little* crazy: she told me about a night earlier that week, when she couldn't fall asleep. And so, she turned on the television, and eventually got to a channel with an infomercial from Peter Popoff. Now for those of us who do not know the man (everyone is entitled to draw their own conclusions, of course), but Peter Popoff is a televangelist; and his most famous (or *infamous*) part of his ministry is the Miracle Spring Water, which you can get specially delivered if you go to his website at peterpopoff.org or, if you find yourself awake in the middle of the night: you will be sure to find the 800 number through his paid advertisement. Joyce called that number, got the water, but she did not let me know of any miracle that came thereafter. It may seem crazy, yes, for how desperate all of us get in this life for a little more hope, a little more healing, a little more normalcy; but I think Joyce just wanted a little more Jesus than anything else.

In the end, what was even crazier about Joyce's life was that she spent twenty-nine years in an inner-city school system that had one of the most negative reputations, not just in the local or surrounding school districts, but throughout the entire state. Failed grades, frequent drop-outs, minimal success on standardized test scores; nevertheless, Joyce was thoroughly convinced that those children were just as loved by God as any child from a better school system or even as much as any beloved character in the entire Scripture. Joyce would even bring her own sons' coats to those students who had none at all.

Joyce was not crazy: she was every parent's dream of a teacher, who not only taught them multiplication and spelling, but who had children convinced they could be loved by someone outside their family. It's rather eye-opening, to say the least, when the people who always insist on a little more Jesus in their own life, end up giving more than their fair share of Jesus to others. And I have this sneaking feeling that's what Simeon did, too, as he waited and waited for that Christ child to come along.

So, when it finally came for the moment of the infant Jesus to be properly presented to Simeon, to the temple, to the entire church of the all

the generations to come; Simeon was entranced in this most captivating holy moment not just for himself, but for the entire world. And I believe when I saw Joyce have that holy moment for herself, was when she stopped me after worship with one of her usual questions. “You must think I’m crazy, but why do we sing ‘O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,’? Hasn’t Jesus already come to us?”

Now, granted, I could have stuck with liturgical appropriateness, making my professors proud, and gone off about connecting with the people of Israel from long ago, or emphasizing we are in this state of waiting for the Second Coming of Christ, but Joyce, in her always-wanting-a-little-more-Jesus near-obsession, had a spiritual breakthrough of realizing that Jesus had most certainly come, not just to Simeon long ago, or to certain righteous or devout people along the way, but to all of us, including to God’s precious child in Joyce. She was not crazy at all. She was right. She had just proclaimed the very Gospel itself.

In the end, as much as we try to identify ourselves with certain people in every story we hear, there is a difference between what happened to Simeon and what has already transpired for us in our own faith journey.

We did not have to wait around for this Jesus to be presented to us. We did not have to show up to a church however many times in our life. We didn't have to reach a certain level of Biblical knowledge or spiritual ecstasy. This Savior of ours was presented into our hearts at the beginning, and God makes the craziest promise of all: that no matter what we do, no matter how many times we mess up with that Jesus in our life, God says in no uncertain terms: that that Christ child will never be taken away from the utter depths of our soul.

The truth is, if it is crazy to be like Joyce: to ask questions, to go through this journey of faith wanting a little more than the standard operating procedure; then, we should all be more than a little crazy. Crazy enough to want more hope, more love, more passion for the world God still loves beyond our wildest imagination. And the Great News remains: we already have all the Jesus Christ we need right in our hearts now and will forevermore. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!