



This story with Simeon would be so incredibly beautiful even if it stopped with him taking Jesus in his arms and praising God, “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” Those words of the most inspirational hope are more than enough for Mary and Joseph, for Anna, for all those present then, for all of us hearers and readers thousands of years later. But Simeon, evidently, cannot stop there. Something else must be said.

It almost seems as if he took the mother, Mary, off to the side, and let her in on a little secret, to prepare her for the rather complex “something else” that would soon happen because of her Messiah/Savior of the world/God-in-the-flesh son: “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.” Sure, Mary had a general idea that God had a tendency to rile up the social order of things: “casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the lowly, fill[ing] the hungry with good things and [sending] the rich away empty,” as she so said, herself, in the Magnificat. But maybe the mother didn’t realize just how much her son was about to rile up the whole world soon enough.

I wonder if another mother in more recent history was made aware of just how much *her* child was about to upset the social order of things. The mother’s name was Lucille, who was, herself, born in the 1930s to sharecroppers in Mississippi, and only attended school through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, when she started helping her father and mother in the fields. She became a housekeeper and ended up marrying a mechanic, still living in Mississippi, until they gave birth to their first child, a daughter. When she turned two, they moved to New Orleans in hopes for better education for the children.

However, it was 1960. It was the South. The family was black. Nevertheless, 165 evidently not-good-enough children because of their skin color, took a test to gain admission to an all-white William Frantz Elementary School, and Ruby Bridges was one of the five who passed. Ruby’s parents met with the superintendent, who tried to pull off a Simeon-like moment, in encouraging Lucille and her husband to pray, because things were about to get much, much worse, now that Ruby was about to walk into a world that was not quite ready for her yet.

And yet, the horrifying, and yet heroic, picture remains etched into our national collective memory, as Ruby was escorted by federal marshals to ensure her safety. Norman Rockwell went on to paint his famous “The Problem We All Live With” not just of Ruby walking in the middle of the marshals, but the splatterings of a tomato that just missed hitting the six-year-old girl. However, after her mother, Lucille, died just over a month ago, Ruby went to her Instagram account and uploaded the picture of her mother holding her hand as she walked out of a once all-white school. Ruby wrote: “Today our country lost a hero. Brave, progressive, a champion for change. She helped alter the course of so many lives by setting me out on my path as a six-year-old little girl. Our nation lost a Mother of the Civil Rights Movement...And I lost my mom. I love you and am grateful for you. May you rest in peace.”

I don’t know if God found a way to prepare Lucille for the rising and falling of many that would ensue because of her little girl being brave enough to walk into that school. I don’t know if there was a Simeon along the way to let her know that she would be part of helping a nation continue to face “The Problem We All Live With,” as Rockwell so titled his painting. And as much as we would like Simeon’s part in the story to stop after his first few lines, something more had to be said: as if he was setting the stage for the holy something more that Jesus would say and do that continues to rile up the social order

of things thousands of years later. Something bold enough to say that people who shouted the horror and threw tomatoes and eggs at a six-year-old girl, in trying to preserve a national identity for a certain kind of skin color and society and religion, and a certain kind of them; to be bold enough to not only say they were wrong, but to walk right alongside the brave little girl as a strong and boldly courageous mother.

Simeon had something else to say to Mary. Lucille and Ruby had something else to say to New Orleans, to the entire country. Jesus had something else to say, not just to people of the time, but to us today. This love of God is far greater and far, far more inclusive than we will ever give it credit for in this life. This grace brought to life in Mary's son may very well drive far too many of us absolutely nuts with just how far-reaching it goes. Regardless, Jesus insists on raising us up time and time again so that we may help bring the very hope to life that Simeon himself proclaimed; that it will relentlessly persist then, now, and for all eternity. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!

*Image: "The Problem We All Live With" (Rockwell)*