

Sermon / 2 February 2025 / Luke 2:22-40 / Groundhog Day (The Presentation of our Lord)

Every day we are given the opportunity to meet Jesus and to act like Jesus.  
Don't waste it.

Today we celebrate the Presentation of Lord. This Feast occurs 40 days after Christmas. As was Jewish custom, Mary and Joseph take their infant son, Jesus, to the Temple on this appointed day – 40 days after his birth - for what is called “the redemption of the firstborn son.” Jesus is presented to the leaders of the temple and special prayers are said to bless him.

At the same time, Mary receives the ritual of purification after childbirth – another tradition.

While the Holy Family is at the temple, they encounter Simeon and Anna who are both overjoyed to meet Jesus.

Simeon is usually portrayed as an elderly man, although the scripture doesn't actually tell us his age. Before we meet him, the Holy Spirit promises that he will see the Messiah before he dies. Simeon's in the temple and sees Jesus. Something clicks and he asks to hold Jesus. He realizes the Holy Spirit has fulfilled the promise. He offers a prayer which we still use. It's called the Nunc Dimins and is on page 120 of the prayer book.

Anna was definitely an old woman. The scripture is clear about that. She's a prophet who lives in the temple and prays all the time. She clearly knows something and is also thrilled to meet Baby Jesus. She spreads the news throughout Jerusalem that the Messiah has arrived.

That day is a big day at the temple. Mary will receive the rite of purification. Jesus will be formally presented as a first-born son. Simeon's promise is kept. Anna's prophecy is told.

That's today. February 2. 40 days after Christmas. This Feast happens every year, but February 2 moves around the week, you know. Here at St. Mark's, we don't always transfer the feast to a Sunday.

Today is also the celebration of Candlemas. The origins of Candlemas, as with many Christian traditions, comes from a pagan festival to celebrate the midpoint of winter. Candles were lit to indicate that spring is on the way.

Christians adopted that festival to indicate that Jesus, officially being presented at the temple, is the light of the world. Christian custom blesses candles, lights candles, and (to the relief of many procrastinators) the puts away the final Christmas decorations.

Today. February 2<sup>nd</sup>. The Presentation of our Lord. The Purification of Mary. Candlemas.

And.... Groundhog Day.

It's important. Stay with me.

In 1993, actor Bill Murray starred in a now-classic movie entitled Groundhog Day. He portrays a cynical news reporter, Phil, who is sent on assignment to Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, to cover the annual Groundhog Day celebration. Phil is not pleased with the assignment. Even though the famous groundhog, also named Phil, indicates winter is over, a blizzard prevents Phil and his colleagues from leaving town.

The next morning, Phil (the reporter) wakes up to discover its still February 2 –it's Groundhog Day again. The plot of the movie is that Phil is trapped in an endless loop of Groundhog Days. Every day it's the same thing.

Hmm. Every day it's the same thing - we are given the opportunity to meet Jesus and to act like Jesus.

Here's the thing about the movie. No one else in town is aware of Phil's predicament. They all behave as if each day is new. But to Phil, each day is mind-numbingly exactly the same as the day before.

At first, Phil uses this to his advantage with nefarious actions. He can rob a bank. He can lie and cheat and do whatever he wants because he knows what everyone is going to do and say. ALSO, there are no consequences to his actions. Anything he does will be forgotten by everyone the next day because, to them, it's a fresh start.

But then, Phil realizes he can actually use this strange loop of time for good. He prevents accidents, he helps people who don't know they need it, he learns French and how to play the piano.

Phil realizes that every day is an opportunity for him to be a better person. He learns not to waste the days.

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Spoiler alert: the spell of the repeating day is broken when Phil allows himself to be open to the power of love.

Does it sometimes feel like we are living the same day over and over?  
Are we overwhelmed with the routine of our lives?  
Are we dismayed by the news cycle that brings us tragic news of plane crashes and wars that never seem to end?  
Do the political changes in our country, the seemingly non-stop partisan bickering, and the possibility of sweeping, dangerous changes make us feel discouraged and without hope?

Does each day seem not only the same, perhaps, but maybe even worse than the day before?

But every day we are given the opportunity to meet Jesus and to act like Jesus. We can't waste it.

We assume Simeon had waited a long time to meet the Messiah as promised. Each day he hoped and prayed it would happen. It finally did happen and he offered a prayer we still pray today.

Anna spent every day in the temple praying for things to be made right in the world. The Messiah showed up and she went to tell others the good news.

Phil, the reporter, in Groundhog Day, didn't change his ways or his repeating day situation all at once. It took a long time. In the movie, we see 38 different Groundhog Days repeated. Another 414 are mentioned. One fan website estimates there could be 12,000 repeating days. That's 33 years! Eventually, he figured it out and got it right.

As Christians, we cannot give in to the sadness and desperation we feel when each day feels just as bad – or lonely – or depressing – or fury-inducing as the last.

As Christians, we cannot throw our hands up in the air and say there is no hope and nothing can be done. We cannot give up our call to follow Jesus.

Like Phil in the Groundhog Day movie, we must learn what to do to make the days of endless sorrow better.

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Jesus calls us to extend love, mercy, acceptance and forgiveness in his name. Let's do that. Every day we must live as Jesus calls us to live.

Let's spend our time looking for solutions to problems instead of just looking for more problems.

Let's help organizations aligned with our belief systems. Volunteer. Give them money or goods.

Let's offer to help someone with their groceries, their medical appointments, their legal documentation, their children, their daily grind.

Let's give thanks for the blessings of our lives and help others with less than we have.

Let's step away from constantly following the news cycle and the endless rabbit holes of political tripe that make us angry, sad, or hopeless. Those are the things that make our days seem so repetitive and take us away from our call as Christians.

I know I sound like a broken record. And I hope that my repeating myself doesn't become a mind-numbing Groundhog Day over and over and over.

But we must not...we...must...not...give up. We must fight for what we believe is the way – the only way – to bring the kingdom of God here to earth. We must extend love, mercy, acceptance, and forgiveness to everyone. That is what Jesus Christ told us to do.

To everyone. Not a select few. Not just the people we like. Not just people like me. And most certainly not a hierarchical framework that a politician suggested this week. Everyone.

Because Jesus lives in every single one of us.

Every day we are given the opportunity to meet Jesus and to act like Jesus.

Today. February 2<sup>nd</sup>. And every day.

Over and over and over and over and over

And again, and again and again and again.

Don't waste it.