

## December 29, 2019 | Sanctuary worship service

TEXT: [Luke 2:25–40](#)

TITLE: **End of an Era**

*By the Rev. Dr. Randy Bush*

Today is December 29, 2019. In a few days it will be the year 2020—the end of another decade. (OK, officially the decade doesn't end for another 12 months, but once you start writing 2020 on checks and forms, it feels like a new decade has begun.) Lists have been appearing about the greatest moments of the past decade. It's fun to look back—to remember people and events that were in the news and think how much has happened in the last ten years.

Let's start with entertainment. The “twenty teens” gave us the final three-part chapter in the Star Wars saga, and a glut of superhero movies from the archives of Marvel and DC comic books. It gave us the genius of Lin-Manuel Miranda's Broadway musical “Hamilton.” It gave us Beyoncé's 2010 hit “Single Ladies” and a decade of music from her, Lady Gaga, Adele, Korean pop stars, up through Billie Eilish. It gave us video games we played addictively on our smartphones, like Angry Birds and Candy Crush. It also gave us internet games that literally millions played in huge groups, like Fortnite and Pokémon Go. There were TV series we watched obsessively: Downton Abbey, Stranger Things, Doctor Who with its first female Dr. Who, plus the nine-year drama of Game of Thrones. More importantly, this past decade saw a steady move away from broadcast stations and cable channels—people cutting their cords to use streaming services and binge watch entire seasons in marathon viewing sessions. The past 10 years was the decade of ride-sharing apps—of Uber and Lyft replacing traditional taxi cabs—and the decade of dating apps—with Tinder's “swipe left, swipe right” becoming part of our national vocabulary.

Lots of other things could be mentioned: the Cubs finally winning the World Series, Twitter taking over the political conversation, Hip Hop and R&B replacing rock and roll, and Spotify replacing radio station scheduled programming. Basically the major events of the past decade fell into two categories: the negative things we are hopefully moving away from and the positive things we are striving to live into. And for that second category, we need Luke's two elderly prophets, Simeon and Anna.

Here are four things that the past ten years have taught us about brokenness and human sin in our world. Go back to December 17, 2010 when a 26-year old street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in Tunisia. It literally provoked the Arab Spring that culminated in a civil war in Syria and thousands of refugees fleeing war, poverty and violence—migrants who became an armada of humanity washing onto the shores of Europe. **#1**—We've learned how interconnected our world is but how prone we are to fearing immigrants, to electing xenophobic dictators, and how nationalist rhetoric is always ready to drown out voices of compassion and justice **#2**—Greed remains one of the worst of the seven deadly sins. We saw this in Boeing's squelching of warning signs and allowing their planes to malfunction and kill all their passengers. We especially saw this in the Sackler family's lust for profits that pushed

Purdue Pharma's sinful marketing of opioids in ways that led to thousands of addictions and deaths.

**#3**—We remain a nation willing to shrug off an epidemic of gun violence for reasons that range from selfish apathy to demonic political gain. Going back 10 years we remember the shootings in Fort Hood, Aurora, the Sandy Hook elementary school; in Charleston and Las Vegas; in the church in Sutherland Springs, the high school in Parkland, and our own Tree of Life synagogue. Little has changed except there is a growing national numbness around mass shootings that sadly keeps us from enacting common sense gun control laws. And **#4**—the social media platforms that were supposed to bring the world together and broaden our horizons too often serve to separate us into narrow groups of consumers whose viewing habits have been profited by tech companies. What does it gain a person to get a million “likes” and followers but to lose one's soul?

We stand on the cusp of a new decade and we wring our hands over the state of the world around us—the migrant crisis, the opioid crisis, the mass shootings, the divisive rhetoric that constantly comes from mass media and social media. But life—faithful living—must involve more than just reacting against what is evil and destructive. Life—faithful living—involves picturing a better world and working, by God's grace, to make that vision a reality. **#1**—As horrific as the 2012 shooting of Trayvon Martin was, and as racist as the grim registry of police shootings of African Americans truly is, the “Black Lives Matter” movement gave voice to a simple principle of true justice that is positively changing the power dynamics and racial understanding of this nation. **#2**—The bravery of the women—from Malala Yousafzai to the accusers of Harvey Weinstein - who have spoken up against harassment, rape and sexual abuse as part of the #metoo movement have given hope to millions of girls and women that they might live without male-dominated oppression and sexual violence.

**#3**—Just saying the name of Greta Thunberg calls to mind the power of the Green movement and the calls to action regarding climate change coming from the young people around us, who are destined to inherit an earth wounded and depleted because of our wasteful ways—but an earth nonetheless that can sustain life for future generations if, in the words of the prophet Isaiah, we let a little child lead us. And **#4**—it has been nothing short of miraculous to witness the past decades' advances regarding marriage equality and newly-found sensitivity for gender issues and intersectionality. There is still much work to be done in all these areas, but our public language has shifted. The vocabulary of blacklivesmatter, #metoo, Green New Deals and marriage equality is now part of our how we talk about life together.

Warnings may stir our souls, but God-given visions of a different future are what save our souls. Simeon and Anna knew this well. When they stepped out of the shadows and approached the Christ child in his parents' arms, they didn't rail against the injustices and oppression of the world in which they'd lived for so many decades. Simeon spoke of departing now in peace, of having eyes that had seen God's salvation, had seen a light of new wisdom and revelation, had felt a hope that would be glorious for an entire nation. Anna's first response was not weeping and raging against the darkness, but of

praising and singing. She connected this child with the idea of redemption—of being made whole—of God’s in-breaking love truly present here on earth at last.

A preaching professor once told me that sermons cannot only be descriptive of the sins and brokenness that need to be fixed in the world; they must also be aspirational—pointing to that which is to come. She said people respond better to a pull than to a push. It’s true. If we only focus on what we are trying to avoid, we will lose heart and stop trying at all. If we hold fast to what we hope to attain, what we know by faith exists and awaits us as part of God’s realm, then we do not lose heart. We run the race with confidence. We mount up on wings like eagles. We celebrate the end of one era even as we say, “Come, Lord Jesus.”

So here’s one final reminder: Almost none of the characters in the gospel Christmas stories were around to see Jesus when he finally began his public ministry as a 30-year old wandering rabbi and miracle worker. Based on short life expectancies back then, almost everyone who knelt to adore the Christ child, who brought tributes or spoke words of praise that first Christmas season would never truly know what became of him. The magi went back home. Simeon and Anna were aged and likely never saw the end of the story in which they played cameo roles. And are we so different from them? We plant trees we won’t see in their maturity. We raise children who grow into adults and become the next generation, whose deeds and accomplishments we won’t live to see. Such is the cycle of life—one age, one decade yielding to the next.

Yet may we be like Simeon and Anna. May whatever we see when we look back always be shaped by what we long to see as we look to the future. May we gently hold children—all children—in our arms and trust, by God’s grace, that we can finally depart in peace. Even today, God is birthing something wonderful for the sake of those who will follow us. May we be willing to speak blessings as we see these moments in our own life stories, and may we, like Simeon and Anna, find words of praise on our lips even to our final days.

AMEN