

Presentation (HC-Gospel) (2020)

A wonderful little cameo. That is what we find in this morning's Gospel.

It is the story of Mary and Joseph's encounter with two rather remarkable senior citizens.

I am speaking, of course, of Simeon and Anna . . . Simeon from whom we get that canticle sung at Evensong, the *Nunc dimittis*, and Anna called in today's Gospel a *prophetess*.

The occasion was two ritual observances prescribed in the Law of Moses:

- Mary's purification following childbirth, and
- The redemption of the firstborn male in a family.

Both took place in the Temple 40 days after Jesus' birth.

You might be interested to know that Candlemas (as today's feast is sometimes called) is the grand finale of the Christmas season . . . which might offer some comfort if you are one of those people who still has not taken down all your holiday decorations.

If that is you, you can stay on schedule by finishing the job during some of those commercials during tonight's Super Bowl game. You will then be ready tomorrow to hang some red hearts for Valentine's Day. ///

On this Candlemas Day, I want to speak to you on the subject of **Ending Well**.

Of course, it would not be healthy to just focus on the end of one's life. In so doing, one would miss many of the flowers along way, and what a sad thing that would be.

More than that, if you were always talking about death and dying, not many people would want to be around you. You would get the reputation of being all 'doom and gloom' . . . 'miserable and morbid'.

No, life is for living, and it should be lived with all the gusto you can muster. I love those words found in Psalm 118, verse 17:

“I shall not die but live, and declare the works of the Lord.”

I commend beginning each day with this affirmation of life.

With that said, though, I want to suggest we cannot really be posed for living unless we are poised for dying. And, who better than Simeon and Anna to show us how?

How would you characterise these two people? What trait do they have in common?

The one that comes to my mind is **faithfulness**.

Both were apparently well-known in the Temple and went there frequently. They were faithful in worship.

Both were faithful in reading their Bibles and knew the promises found in the sacred writings.

Both were faithful in hope, earnestly expecting to see the promises in Scripture fulfilled.

That reminds me of a story. Once we had in this church an elderly man who was quite skilful in making wine and beer. Once, I was at his house, and he poured me a sample of his brew.

As we sat out under a tree enjoying it, he confided that ever since he was confirmed in the Swedish Lutheran Church as a very young man, he had had a premonition that he was going to be around when our Lord came again.

I found myself looking at him saying: “Why you are like aged Simeon in the Temple waiting for our Lord’s first coming.” /// We both laughed.

He was wrong about being around when the Lord came again, but the point is he lived in hope of God’s promises made in Scripture being fulfilled. And, like Simeon and Anna, he was faithful . . . faithful to the end.

And that is where you and I should be as well. But, as you know, there are many distractions out there in the world. So, we have to be on our guard . . . and, without saying, we require the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

Has the Lord laid on your heart some task? Then be about it. Don't get diverted. 'Now' is the operative word.

The first rung on the ladder of finishing well is faithfulness. But with faithfulness comes **illumination**. That is the second.

We see this played out in the life of Simeon and Anna.

What did everyone else see that day in the courts of the Temple?

Well, an ordinary young mother carrying a baby, perhaps with a pacifier in his mouth, and a husband trailing along behind carrying a diaper bag?

How many of you dads have ever done that?

In any case, that is what most people saw that day. But what did Simeon and Anna see?

They saw God's Anointed, Israel's Messiah, God in human flesh. Their eyes were opened to see more.

Clara H. Scott, an American hymnwriter of the 19th century has given us these words:

Open my eyes, that I may see
Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me;
Place in my hands the wonderful key
That shall unclasp and set me free.

What is that wonderful key?

I have already told you -- faithfulness. From faithfulness comes illumination . . . greater vision.

But where do we begin? I want to suggest with doing those things we know to be right and God's will for our life. Such things as:

--Believing on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ . . . giving Him our whole-hearted allegiance . . . asking for forgiveness for past mistakes . . . walking with Him day by day.

--Being faithful in our attendance of services of public worship unless providentially hindered. I dare say that there is no place in God's kingdom for solo players. God wants us in a family.

--Being faithful in saying our prayers. Why not begin by taking home today's pew sheet and praying for those whose names are listed?

--Being faithful in looking out for the needs of the less fortunate, and on and on I could go.

We all – I suspect – know more than we do. So, let's begin with those things.

Faithfulness . . . illumination, but there is a third wrung up the ladder. What is that wrung?

It is graceful **acceptance of God's plan**, including our appointed exit. Simeon's hymn in today's Gospel is a primer for this.

Notice, the word with which he begins: "now". "Now, lettest thy servant depart in peace."

What he is saying is that the highest wish on his 'bucket list' has been crossed off. What was that wish? It was to see the salvation of the Lord.

The same should be true with us. The highest item on our list should be to have an encounter with Jesus Christ. Then and only then, can we say, "Now".

I remember seeing in a vintage magazine a column by Eleanor Roosevelt, widow of our great wartime President. Someone had written in and asked: "**Mrs. Roosevelt, aren't you afraid of flying?**"

Her, reply:

"No, I am 65 years old. I've lived a long life, and am very content to say, may the Lord's will be done."

She had been faithful in doing what she felt God had called her to do. She had been guided by the light she had been given, and now there was graceful acceptance.

That did not mean she was ready to roll over and die. It meant she had been freed up to spend and be spent in the service of the causes most important to her.

Can you say the same this morning?

Ending well is not so much about dying as living . . . living each moment with our eyes open to heaven . . . knowing where we came from and where we are going . . . having an inner peace that transcends circumstances . . . possessing a graceful acceptance of God's plan.

Allow me to close with some words attributed to John Henry Newman, a prayer:

O LORD, support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in thy mercy grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last. *Amen.*

That, my friends, is what 'ending well' looks like on the ground. Go for it. Make it your goal.