

## Sermon Archive 279

Sunday 2 February, 2020

Knox Church, Christchurch

Lesson: Luke 2: 22-40

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



Our community has suffered a real loss, with the passing of Simeon. So many people I've spoken to over the last few days have said they can't quite believe that he's gone. It seems inconceivable that he won't be there, in his usual place, watching the world go by and keeping an eye on who's been coming and going from the place. Never a gate keeper, in the negative or classical sense, still he was always there, just by the door.

He didn't talk much about his earlier life, but we know he spent most of it looking forward to things being better. He wasn't a prophet - not one for proclaiming, declaiming, confronting; but he had a deep sense, so it seems to me, of the world being out of sorts. Well, Roman occupation; loss of national pride; tax crimes hither and yon; that missing bit in our life together where he felt God ought to have been. Simeon presented this kind of longing for things to be better. Now those of you who knew him too, will be thinking just now, "hang on Matthew; you're making him sound like a sad sack". Indeed; Simeon wasn't one of those. He had this genuine sense of "things will be all right". Although things were out of kilter (and we all knew they were), he always made you feel like it would be OK. It was like he knew that they would - in his life time - with his own eyes, in his life time . . . yeah.

One thing you could say about Simeon was that he had a wonderful turn of phrase. Words were certainly things he knew how to use. It's amazing that no one ever heard him speak and think "that should definitely be a song!" One example, just the other day, and now how poignant, seeing how things have turned since, was when he picked up that baby the other day. What he said was so beautiful. Looking into the eyes of the wee one, he just says "my eyes have seen God's salvation", and he launches

into a wee poem about light shining, and people understanding, and glory beaming. And it all kind of worked - and that stuff about "things will be all right" felt true. A song for the baby - a song for **us** - a song for the world. If someone had written down his words, it would have been a wonderful legacy for our community - a deep affirmation that God's big picture had fallen into our smaller world - our bloody occupied, messy world of babies and old people, and chance meetings, and people watching the travelers comes and go - and knowing that it's all somehow part of God making things right. We're going to miss Simeon, I know.

Would anyone else like to say a few words? Anna; thank you.

-ooOoo-

Hello; my name is Anna, and like Simeon, I've been around this place for a while. I'd like to echo what Matthew has said about him. He **was** a person of faith, whose faith (over quite a long, complicated time) was kind of reassuring to those around him. And we all know that some of his words could have been songs. But for the sake of truth and record, I need to say that sometimes he could use words that weren't all that pretty. Like you, Matthew, just the other day I saw him with that baby. And what you've forgotten to say, Matthew, is that straight after the "God is good" bit, and after the "things are coming right" bit, he had a few much less poetic words for the baby's mother. I don't know, even our most beloved ones can put their foot in it.

He said to that poor mother that her child was going to be the cause of argument. He was going to cause people to rise and fall, and move into factions. He was going to whistle-blow, and unmask, and out people. He actually said to that poor woman that her son would be such that she'd feel like a sword was cutting her heart. O Simeon, that was awkward!

What made it even more awkward, was that I wanted to say "Hush, you foolish old man!" and tell the mother that he was daft. I **wanted** to, but I couldn't - because I kind of felt in my bones that he was right. Things around this baby were going to get tricky. Tricky? Painful . . . So I wasn't going to contradict what the old man had said. But nor could I leave his words as the last ones ringing in the woman's ears. So, I grabbed the

baby, and praised God for him, and told anyone who'd listen that he was a wonderful reason to hope, and rejoice, and be glad. "Things **will** be all right" I said. Not in any way that anyone would ever put to music, Simeon; but it was important to say. No child, not even this one, should have his mother leaving the temple holding a heart rent asunder.

I'm sorry! It feels wrong to be critical of someone who now has died. And I'm not wanting to be. He was my friend, and I'll miss him.

Would anyone else like to speak?

-ooOoo-

Kia Ora; I'm one of those people who turn up to funerals, and no one quite knows who I am, or why I'm speaking - but I speak anyway about things that don't really have anything to do with the person who's died. So, unaccustomed as I am to public speaking, here I go. It's really just a word of encouragement to Anna. Don't worry too much about the woman that Simeon might have upset, Anna. A friend of mine knows someone up in Nazareth, and she said that things had turned out pretty well for that particular family. The little kid, whose name I forget just now, is growing up into a nice young man. He's strong. People say he's intelligent - the word they use is "wise". It's like the favour of God is on their house. No word at all about rising and falling, and argument or rejection. Certainly nothing about hearts being sliced in two. So even if Simeon did upset the mother at the time, things have worked out well. God is shining up in Nazareth, so Simeon was right. Things will be all right. That seems to be what people are seeing, anyway - with their own eyes they are seeing what they think might be salvation.

Would anyone else like to speak?

-ooOoo-

Tena koutou katoa. My name is Luke, and I'm a writer. I used to be a

doctor, but that's another story. **This** story sounds very much like one I felt I needed to write a while ago. Like this one, it began with a couple taking their child to a temple - to celebrate his birth by giving thanks to God. And like in this one, they came across a couple of elderly old folk - slightly unusual ones. There were songs to God, and words to mothers, high praise and dark prophecy - all of that. I don't need to retell that part of the story. What I do want to say, though, is that my story (or should I say his story - the story was **his** - I just wrote it), was complicated. Part of it was a song directed to heaven - full of praise, and fulfilment, and revelation, and salvation, and light. But part of it was about the piercing of a heart - of many hearts. If you think that God's song is only the one flying to heaven, that God's song is only the one about glory and peace, then you haven't really heard God's story. There is something about our faith that requires the big picture and the small picture to touch. There is something about our faith that requires hope and difficult experience, faith and suffering, fulfilment and striving to speak, each to the other. There is something right and true about an old man holding a baby, and singing to God, then speaking darkly to the mother. Not just one song that gets written and sung, but another song that people don't speak about much. It's as if, right at the beginning of the story, when the baby still is new, that the way to eternal life will be through some Good Friday. Thanks for the opportunity to speak.

-ooOoo-

Thank you all for speaking. I know it would have meant a lot to Simeon. Shame that we didn't really speak about him, and ended up focusing on the baby. Did anyone ever remember the baby's name? Someone from Nazareth, I guess. Well, the hearse is waiting outside, and we've probably used up enough words for now. So, let's keep a moment of quiet.

The Knox Church website is at: <http://www.knoxchurch.co.nz.html> . Sermons are to be found under News / Sermons.