

Sermon Archive 315

Sunday 25 October, 2020

Knox Church, Christchurch

Lesson: Luke 2: 22-40

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



The service at which this sermon was preached was our annual Presbyterian Support Services (Upper South Island) service. Since we leave time within the service to hear of the work and priorities of PSUSI, the sermon is deliberately kept short. This year, Barry Helem, PSUSI's Chief Executive, wanted to focus on Support's work with the elderly. For a sermon that might resonate with this theme, I chose a reading which features two elderly people.

-ooOoo-

Last year, or maybe it was earlier this year (I can't recall - time is moving differently now), the Alpine Presbytery, for whom I have much love and appreciation, was called to make comments in relation to a proposal to change the way Presbyterian ministers should be trained. The Presbytery allowed for all members of the regional community to make comment, but announced with great delight that it had given special preference to collating the views of currently ordained people aged 35 or under. The presbytery wanted to hear most from the young ones.

Ah well; Presbytery must have had its reasons for that. I found myself wondering, well beyond the age of 36, when I had become so old and irrelevant that I was no longer able to contribute to a

conversation about the future.

I have found, actually, as I have become older, that I have deeper observations to make, and a bolder spirit through which to express them. But now that I'm older than 35, . . . oh well. Life, experience, learning, becoming . . .

This morning we have two readings, really one reading cut in half.

They're both set in the temple, which is a busy and vibrant place. People from all around the nation go there - sacrificing, marking stages in life, bringing their first-born to be dedicated. It's a shopping mall of a place - much busier than home . . . My Uncle David, who lived by himself - as he became an elderly person, he spent a lot of time at his local shopping mall. It's not that he had lots of shopping to do. The mall was simply where the people were. Yes, the mall was owned by a big capitalist conglomerate which only wanted money, and didn't care for the soul of David B, but for him it was a living, breathing, moving and lively thing. And he needed all of that to keep himself well.

I find the figures of Simeon and Anna interesting. The story presents them both as elderly. Simeon's detail is that he's been waiting a long time to see God. He's a person of a long-time-waiting. Anna's described as having had a husband, lost a husband, having lived long since then, now to the age of eighty four. And both age-old Simeon and elderly Anna are presented as people who spend a lot of time at the temple. (Is home, perhaps, for each of them a wee bit quiet?)

As I envisage the story in my mind, imagining what it must have been like, I see two elderly people as kind of "still points" within the busyness. I see them as those whom maybe the world, being rather too busy with its temple to-ing and fro-ing, doesn't see - a

pair of still and invisible old people (older than 35, maybe not much of value to say).

But the story tells me that they are the very ones who notice the child coming into the world and changing the world forever.

A delightful little twist to the story is that when Anna works out who the child is, she begins to speak about him to everyone around her - as if she's one of those talkers who had no one at home to talk to. (I'm talking too much, I know I am!) O, Anna! Shhh! Enough about the child. Ah, but her speaking is perfect. She has perceived the truth and is opening it up for others.

In the story of Jesus, as it's told by Luke, as Jesus is revealed, some of the first ones to notice are the invisible elderly who really seem to need company. Bless them, and praise God for their place among us.

For us, then, do you think that experience in life allows us to look at life differently, and maybe see God's presence in the world more clearly? Do you think that the passage of time, with its learnings along the way, allows us to see things (fulfilments, the coming true of promises, babies being brought to the temple) that we wouldn't notice if we were young and ambitious? Is there a mellowing of the person that allows us to notice the presence of God?

This sermon is short. If you hear it as a younger person, God loves you, and calls your youth to serve the gospel. If you hear it as an older person, whose home is a wee bit quiet, maybe that quietness is room for you to hear God's voice. And if you hear it as a very old person, wondering if the world cares about the days you have lived, and the things that you have learned, well

remember Simeon and Anna - the first seers of whom Jesus was.
A moment of quiet.

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