

Sermon Archive 566

Sunday 4 January, 2026

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Lesson: Luke 2: 25-35

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



On my way from the Baker's Delight bread shop back to the underground carpark at Northlands, I walk past a set of benches just outside the supermarket. On one of the benches is an elderly man whose resemblance to the late Bob Fendall is strong. Bob had a wonderful smile, and so does this man - smiling right to his eyes. He has a good collection of wrinkles on his face, and they're all following happy lines in this moment. He has less hair on his head than maybe he had in his prime. He's got a few moles, and his teeth have suffered no whitening treatments. I'm not sure whether it's his likeness to Bob that took my attention, or just the amazing smile (a look of pure delight).

Parked in front of the man is a stroller. I can't see who's in it, but whoever he or she is, this is the cause of the smile. Old age sees the brand new. Experience sees innocence. Waiting sees arriving; end of life sees beginning of life - and it just beams! I thank God that I got to see it. I depart in peace.

-ooOoo-

We who have been alive for a while have our own kind of beauty. It says in the Bible that grey hair is a crown of glory, gained in a righteous life - says it in the Bible! And you know, we learn things along our way to the crown, sometimes becoming kinder or wiser - or gentler versions of ourselves, more entertained by the absurd. Nothing in the text actually says that Simeon was terribly old - except that he's righteous and devout - what was

that about righteousness being a good fruit harvested over longer times? Certainly he's been contemplating the things he hopes to see before he dies - which sounds to me more like the meditation of an older person.

When Simeon sees the child, holds him in his arms, all those ordinary things (yet extraordinary things in beauty and delight) are going on, don't we think? The ordinary smile-making joy of age beholding youth, seeing someone tender just launching out on life - someone just beginning as we are ending - a sign of our story continuing, a story of breathing, and learning to walk, and cry, and look at the stars. The stuff we see on benches outside our bread shops . . .

But for Simeon there is another dimension. He sees in *this* little one something about God's story - God's love story for the world. For a long time, the world has been waiting, waiting for consolation - for salvation, revelation, light and glory. The Holy Spirit is said to have been resting on him; and maybe it is this same Spirit who allows him to see what he sees through the frame of God. He sees in the child that God is keeping the promise. The promise now is fulfilled for Simeon at least, because God places in his arms this gift of someone new, someone just beginning, someone to chase the smile to the corners of the eyes of the world. As God gives the new, into the arms of the old, something beautiful occurs and Simeon (perhaps on behalf of all the faithful) praises God.

-ooOoo-

We look back now on 2025. Our looking must include visions from Gaza, and Ukraine. It includes no one in power worrying too greatly about whether that second shot at a now-disabled boat in the Caribbean constitutes a war crime. It includes the recent Bondi shooting, the running, crying people. It includes

significant errors of judgment in senior ranks of the Aotearoa Police, with all resultant damage to public trust. It includes many stories of Goliath mocking, deriding the upstart David - his machine rolling on over the little ones. 2025.

2025 was not atypical. Most years, when honestly reviewed, can present us with reason to be sad. And not just sad, but maybe a wee bit cynical. To preserve us from being hurt again, from forming hopes only then to lose them, from maybe appearing "gullible" before the worldly-wise, we can be a wee bit careful about bringing to a new year anything too much in the shape of a hope. "Next year will be much like last year" we say. There are patterns here to caution us, to rein in what might be our consolation.

Simeon takes the brand new baby in his arms, and the Spirit upon him moves him to praise God for the newness, and what it all means. The promise is kept. This brand new life is going to bring life to the world. God opens the way to life for those who have waited, by placing something new and living into the arms of Simeon.

I wonder whether, on the first Sunday of 2026, we might be moved to see the new year not as a point along the same old grind, but as something new from God. Could we perhaps receive this new thing (365 more days to fill with life) as a sign of God keeping the promise? Could we praise God for a new beginning, and cherish it as the coming of the new light, something that will make some people stumble, yes (the old Goliaths), but also cause many to rise?

We do not know what this year will bring; but we enter it with this image of Simeon entering a new phase of hope and life. He feels like he has received all that he needs now to know

deep peace for whatever now is left for him to live. He moves from longing to blessing, from searching to holding, from feeling like something isn't yet complete, to knowing that he now has seen what he has needed to see.

Not all of us are inclined to make New Year resolutions - maybe partly because we've become cynical (as thought about earlier). But for those of us who **are** inclined, I wonder if Simeon might fashion our resolve. Could this be a year in which we look for the smile beaming over the stroller? Could it be a year when we take the moments we are given as gifts, as movements into life where there is light and glory? Could it be a year for the cultivation of gratitude - and a seriousness of spying out the signs that God is being faithful? Could we maybe say "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, because mine eyes have seen . . . !

If the sermon were to end here, then it would have been a shorter one than usual. But that's all right - no need to fill every minute of the rest of the year with sermons.

An old man takes a baby in his arms. He praises God, because he knows that this moment is a sign of divine providence. We see this delightful scene. Do we smile? Most certainly, we keep a moment of quiet.