

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Simeon Blesses

Scripture: Luke 2:25-35

December 31, 2023

Opening Hymn: #141: Good Christians, all rejoice

Choruses: #145: In the bleak mid-winter, #143: Infant holy, infant lowly

After Sermon: #148: It came upon the midnight clear

Closing Hymn: #153: Joy to the world

Rev. Steve Filyk

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Christmas

If you knew that this afternoon,  
     You were going to die,  
         That your hearts would stop beating,  
             That you chest would stop rising and falling...

Would you be ready for it?

This is likely apocryphal but someone has quoted  
     Former US Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders as saying:  
         "We all will probably die of something sooner or later."

Are you ready to die?

If you are not ready to die,  
     What would you need to say, to do,  
         or know, so that you could leave this earth in peace?

PAUSE

Back in 2007 a movie starring Morgan Freeman  
     And Jack Nicholson was released.

It was called "The Bucket List"

Let me share with you a brief synopsis  
     That I found online:

"Two elderly men,  
     blue-collar automotive mechanic Carter Chambers  
         and billionaire Edward Cole  
             meet for the first time in a hospital owned by Edward

after both men are diagnosed with terminal lung cancer.

Carter, a gifted amateur historian and family man,  
     wanted to become a history professor in his youth

but chose to start a family instead.

Edward, a four-time divorced healthcare tycoon and cultured loner,  
enjoys drinking...

one of the most expensive coffees in the world

and mocking his personal valet Matthew,  
whom he wrongly but intentionally calls Thomas.

While in the hospital,  
Carter and Edward manage to find common ground.

For fun, Carter started writing a list of activities to do  
before he "kicks the bucket."  
After hearing he has less than a year to live,  
he dejectedly discards his list.

Edward finds the list the next morning  
and urges him to do everything on it,  
adds his own items  
and offers to finance all expenses.

Carter agrees and though his wife Virginia objects,  
the two patients begin their globetrotting last vacation  
along with Matthew [Edward's valet].

They go skydiving,  
drive [vintage cars around the] California Speedway,  
fly over the North Pole,  
eat dinner at Chèvre d'or,

visit the Taj Mahal,  
ride motorcycles on the Great Wall of China,  
attend a lion safari in Tanzania  
and visit Mount Everest."<sup>i</sup>

The pair do anything and everything  
To suck all the remaining marrow out of life.

It is entertaining watching their escapades.  
Of course this is all fantasy.

The movie commentator Roger Ebert wisely noted  
"The Bucket List" is a movie about two old codgers  
who are nothing like people,  
both suffering from cancer that is nothing like cancer,  
and setting off on adventures that are nothing like possible."<sup>ii</sup>

Some of you have survived cancer,  
 And I'll wager that in the midst of it,  
 You were in no condition to go on a safari.

But while the movie takes us on a fantasy flight,  
 It eventually brings us back to reality.

Carter realises he needs to go back home to his wife,  
 And there the cancer returns with a vengeance  
 And ultimately takes his life.

Edward's cancer goes into remission.  
 And he gathers the courage  
 to be reconciled with his estranged daughter.

In the end that movie  
 That has popularised making a 'bucket list' of our own,  
 That has popularised going to the ends of the earth  
 Teaches us that the things that matters most  
 Are often closer to home.

If you knew that this afternoon,  
 You were going to die,  
 Would you be ready for it?

If you aren't ready to die,  
 What would you need to say, to do,  
 or know, so that you could die in peace?

Today's Bible lesson continues  
 From where we left off last Sunday morning.

Last Sunday morning we were told about Jesus' birth,  
 And how this Good News was announced  
 To of all people, a group of lowly shepherds.

Today's reading brings us 40 days forward.  
 The family is no longer in Bethlehem,  
 but in the Jerusalem Temple.

They have come to the Temple for Mary's purification,  
 And Jesus' consecration.

While they are there  
 They encounter a man named Simeon.

Simeon is described like John the Baptist's parents [Zechariah and Elizabeth]  
 As being "righteous and devoted".

Simeon spent his whole life waiting,  
 Waiting for the arrival of the Messiah,  
 The one long-promise to bring comfort  
 and support to the nation of Israel.

Simeon was sensitive to God's leading and direction,  
 And in his waiting had been told that  
 He would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

The day that Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the Temple,  
 Simeon is prodded by the Holy Spirit to go there too.

It is not clear how Simeon knows that the Messiah  
 is not a grown man but a baby.

It is not clear why he overlooks  
 those offering expensive sacrifices like lamb or calves  
 and seeks out a poor family offering  
 a pair of small birds.

But by the guidance of the Holy Spirit  
 Simeon finds Jesus.

He takes the baby into his arms,  
 Looks into the little ones' eyes,  
 And praises God for letting him see the promised salvation.

Simeon is in fact holding salvation.

Jesus's name means "The Lord is my salvation."  
 Simeon is literally holding "salvation" in his arms."<sup>iii</sup>

For this gift, Simeon blesses God.  
 He declares this Messiah will not just be consolation for Israel,  
 But "a light of revelation to the Gentiles".

Like Zechariah who sang God's praises at the naming of John,  
 Simeon blesses God  
 And then goes on to prophetically describe the work of the One  
 He is holding.

Simeon reveals that this salvation will come at great cost.  
 "[How] God's appointed redeemer [Jesus] will deal  
 with this suffering [of his people] by sharing it himself.

Simeon speaks dark words about opposition,  
 and about a sword that will pierce [the mother's heart]..."<sup>iv</sup>

This is the dark side of Christmas.  
 God sends his salvation to a people  
 Who are longing for freedom.

But this salvation will arrive in a different package  
 Than most would imagine.  
 Instead of coming in might and power,  
 This salvation arrives in the form  
 Of a dependent infant  
 born into a poor family.

Jesus will grow in wisdom and stature.  
 His ministry will be marked by signs and wonders  
 And will culminate in the conquering of death.

But the peace Jesus brings will not be implemented by force.  
 It will come through persuasion and costly sacrifice.

Simeon for his part is able to see in this tiny infant  
 A glimpse of God's great plan of salvation.

For him it is just a foretaste.  
 Simeon will be around to see the salvation inaugurated,  
 Let alone arrive in its fulness  
 Something that we are all still waiting for...

But the birth of Jesus is for him the sure sign  
 That God is fulfilling old promises  
 And that the future is secure.

Simeon is now able to die in peace.

PAUSE

Are you ready to die in peace?

There may be much in your life that remains undone, unfinished.

You may have strained relationships  
 And still be longing for reconciliation.

You may have old dreams  
 Of doing or seeing things that remain out of reach.

You may have ongoing worries about your children/grandchildren  
 And their ability to navigate our complex world.

You may be fearful for our nation, our culture  
 That has drifted from its Christian moorings.

You may be worried about our church  
And its fractures and splinters.

To quote the hymn:

“Though with a scornful wonder  
the world sees us oppressed,  
by schisms rent asunder,  
by heresies distressed...”<sup>v</sup>

So how can any of us die in peace  
With all these burdens and unfinished business?

Maybe like Simeon, we just need to pay attention  
To those signs that tell us God is busy working.  
Maybe we can see Jesus  
That God’s good plans are moving forward.

Maybe like Simeon, we just need to trust  
that because they are in motion,  
They will one day, one day, be fulfilled.

No that does NOT mean that you will necessarily see  
Your children all getting along  
and gathering for Christmas.

It doesn’t NOT mean that you will one day  
Finally sort out all your photographs  
And find good homes for those sets of china  
You have been caretaking.

But the arrival of Jesus,  
His life and ministry,  
His death and resurrection  
Mean that in the end

God’s greater purposes will be accomplished.

We will one day experience the full vision God has for us:  
God dwelling with God’s people,  
In a place where there is no more death or mourning  
Or crying or pain.<sup>vi</sup>

May we trust in THIS vision,  
So that we may die in peace.  
So that we may LIVE in peace. Amen.

<sup>i</sup> Contributors to Wikimedia projects. "The Bucket List - Wikipedia." 20 Dec. 2023, en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The\_Bucket\_List&oldid=1190987471.

<sup>ii</sup> Ebert, Roger. "The Bucket List movie review & film summary (2008) | Roger Ebert." <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-bucket-list-2008>

<sup>iii</sup> Stephen Farris "Luke 2:22-40" The Lectionary Commentary: the Gospels 303

<sup>iv</sup> N.T. Wright Luke for Everyone 25,26

<sup>v</sup> "The Church's One Foundation"

<sup>vi</sup> See Revelation 21