

READ the TEXT

Christmas has come at last – hooray!

I hope you had a great holiday – some good food,
some renewed connections with people who matter to you,
and, yes, some meaningful worship times.

I’m sure you had a long list of things to do as you got ready.
Like Santa, you “made a list and checked it twice,” eh?

But on this Sunday after Christmas, I’d like you to make another list.

Reach out and get one of those little white cards in the seat in front of you.
You’ll need a pencil or a pen, too.

Ready? Here goes.

Make a list of things you want to do before you die.
Some people call it a “Bucket List” – as in, “things to do before I kick the
bucket”!

There was a movie not long ago with that title.

Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman played a couple of men who had
something in common. They were in the same hospital room, and they were both
terminally ill.

They decided that instead of just curling up and waiting to die,
they’d try to make the most of their remaining time.

Each one made a bucket list, and one by one they began to do the things
on the list.

An interesting movie. Thought-provoking...

What would you put on your “Bucket list”? What do you still want to do with your life?

That might take a bit of pondering!
Go ahead. I’ll give you time. Ponder and write it down.
(Wait for an appreciable time)

Anyone want to share? What's on your list? (They share)

Three of the things on my own bucket list would be:

- a) Catch a really big SALMON, b) WRITE A BOOK! and c) TAKE SUE TO SWITZERLAND.
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Thanks for doing that.

It's good and challenging to ask macro-type questions because they reveal what we think life's about.

But what if I had asked the question differently?

Not "What do I want to do with my life?"

but

"What does God want to do with my life?"

Would that change your list?

As Christians, our "to do" list is a good place to make sure that His will and our wills match!

Today's Gospel lesson does that.

In Luke 2 we hear the song of a man who checked off the last thing on his life's "to do" list, his "bucket list."

This man is Simeon.

What do we know about Simeon?

He was a Jew living in Jerusalem. A very old man by the time Jesus was born. Maybe in his 80s or even his 90s, like some of you.

We know he was a man of impeccable character – righteous in life, devoted entirely to God.

We know that Simeon had one BIG WISH on his bucket list – that he would get to see the Messiah the Jews had waited for so long.

Finally, we know that God had promised Simeon a great thing –

He was going to grant Simeon's wish.

He would let Simeon see that child with his own eyes before he died.

Luke tells us the story...

Simeon has believed the promise, and he has taken to waiting for it.

Day after day he goes to the Temple.

Not with frustration, but with a confident joy...it could be any day!

At last Jesus is born. When it's time for Jesus to be presented at the Temple, the Holy Spirit steps in and guides Simeon right to Him.

Think about that. Even as a baby, Jesus is already drawing people to Himself.

Just like he drew the shepherds at his birth.

Just like He draws us to Himself today.

Now watch what Simeon does.

Upon seeing the child, he goes to the parents and reaches out to take the child... a stranger to them, mind you! And they let him do it.

Simeon literally takes hold of the promise of God that has now become so tangible he can touch it.

And then the old man breaks into song!

Can you picture other people in the temple courts stopping, staring with open mouths as they listen?

I've picked Simeon's story as my sermon text for 2 reasons – one liturgical and one practical.

First, the liturgical reason.

Simeon's song has become a part of Christian worship.

It's in our hymnal...in several spots, actually. It's the song we sing in the liturgy right after Holy Communion. It still bears the old Latin title, Nunc Dimittis.

Hear what Simeon sings (a la hymnal tune page 211):

O Lord, now let your servant depart in heavenly peace

For I have seen the glory of your redeeming grace

A light to lead the Gentiles unto your holy hill

The glory of your people, your chosen Israel.

God had promised this day would come...and it came!

It is enough for Simeon. When he sings, “Lord, now dismiss your servant in peace,” he’s saying,

“My life is COMPLETE! I’m ready to die. I’ve seen it all...done it all. God kept His promises. I finished my list!”

That’s worth a song, for sure!

Simeon wasn’t the first to break out singing...

In the Gospel of Luke, there are three other songs that have already been sung.

Mary had her Magnificat.

Zechariah had his Benedictus.

The angels sang their Gloria in Excelsis Deo.

That’s a big part of what worship’s all about.

We HEAR WHAT GOD DOES, and then WE SING!

We have a look at Simeon’s song so that we can worship with understanding.

That’s the liturgical reason...

Now here’s the practical reason.

Simeon is a person who can show us what our “life list” is all about.

He can help us figure out what’s worth living – or dying – for.

Simeon says he’s ready to die. Are you? Am I?

We should be, shouldn’t we, because what happened to Simeon has happened to us.

The Spirit has led us to Jesus. Called out to us, grabbed hold of us and led us right to Him.

We couldn’t find Jesus under our own power. Nope. We needed to be led and pointed just as Simeon was.

And now that He’s come into our lives, we’re ready for anything. Ready for life. Ready for Death.

I’ve had more than one occasion to be at someone’s bedside when that person actually died. I’m sure some of you have too.

I’ve heard stories of people who wait...who seem to hold on to their lives until they get the chance to “say goodbye” to someone.

Simeon is like that in a way.

But the reason he's holding on isn't to say "Good-bye." It's to say "hello"!

"Hello, Savior of the world, and of me!"

That brings me to our lists. Have you thought that one of the great things on your list could be to help people

say HELLO to Jesus

before they say GOODBYE to the world?

For that same Spirit of God who took hold of us

is even now busy nudging and prodding and pointing all people to Him.

In God's design, that's a part of our PURPOSE in living.

The Spirit uses us to help sinful people rendezvous with their Savior.

He gives us the words to say, as he gave Simeon the words to sing.

Imagine the impact on Mary and Joseph that day. It says "they marveled."

Imagine how the bystanders in the Temple courts must have reacted.

But Simeon isn't finished.

Now he turns to face Mary and Joseph and says to them these sobering words: "This child is destined to cause the fall and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

Simeon sees the baby Jesus, and he doesn't say, "Cute baby!"

like everyone else because he sees more.

God shows Simeon conflict and suffering. He sees all the way to the cross and Mary grieving there before it on that day.

Can you see that far this Sunday after Christmas? To that cross?

To the empty grave on Easter?

(Pause)

Back to our lists.

Everybody's got a "to do" list We're in a rush to get it done.

This story reminds us that we need to think about a different list –
a list of what GOD HAS ALREADY DONE.

I'm glad God has such a list.

It makes life worth living and death worth dying.

It means we need not wait around for sins to be forgiven.

That's been done.

We don't have to worry about our destiny.

God has prepared a place already.

It means that no matter when death comes – even now! – we can sing with
Simeon, “Lord, now dismiss your servant in peace.”

Meanwhile, the one great thing I have left to do is to help people say “hello”
to Jesus before they say “goodbye” to the world.

Simplifies things, doesn't it?

Now may the peace of God...