

Reading: Luke 2:22-40

When we were co-vicars of Burwood parish, I was really shocked. The New Life pastor came to me one day. The New Life congregation met in the school hall. “I want to know your secret,” he said. I didn’t know I had a secret so I said “What secret is that?” “The secret of having so many lovely old people at All Saints” . He went on to explain that he watched the congregation coming in on Sunday and he was jealous at all the old people we had. He explained that at the New Life church in Burwood he was the oldest person there and he was 49. “When people get to a certain age they leave,” he explained. “What’s your secret to holding the old folk?” It was kind of ironic because I had watched his congregation go into the hall on a Sunday afternoon and was jealous that they had so many young people. So often as Anglicans we beat ourselves up at not having enough young people rather than celebrating our mature ones.

No one could accuse Luke the Gospel writer of making that mistake. Today in a very beautiful reading we see the affirmation of two very old people. Anna is 84 and Simeon has been in the temple for many decades. In case you don’t think 84 is that old remember this is 2000 years ago and the average life expectancy was about 37. Anna and Simeon lived at the temple patiently waiting for the Messiah to come. We know Anna is very poor because of the traditional acts of good works: prayer, fasting and almsgiving she can only pray and fast. In other words, she has no money.

Joseph and Mary, faithful Jews, are also very poor. They can only offer two pigeons rather than a lamb. This young family are welcomed by

two very old representatives of Israel. There is that magic moment when Simeon gives his canticle of praise over the child Jesus.

This song is known so well to older Anglicans. We had it at every morning prayer service. Choirs would sing it too. It's in our prayers at time of death. We also say it when a priest is buried

Lord now let your servant go in peace,

Your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people, a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel.

The magic that happens when an older person holds a child has a name. My nurse daughter tells me it's called sympathetic resonance. I prefer to simply call it love. You might know it yourself: that wonderful feeling when holding a newborn. Does life get any better than that? - especially if it's your child or a relative. Simeon describe that feeling as peace. And that's a pretty good description.

Imagine how affirming the holy family must have found the whole experience. They probably knew Anna and Simeon were prophets (people talk), but to be sought out and greeted by them, how encouraging for Joseph and Mary's faith and their parenting. Every child is special, this one only more so.

All of us have had someone encourage us in our faith. We wouldn't be here if someone hadn't encouraged us in our faith. We belong before we believe. And children need that feeling of belonging most of all.

For faith to take root in our lives research tells us we need older people who take an interest in us. I wonder who that person was for you. Church is great but the encouragement we need happens best in the

home. I was blessed to have both parents with faith and I remember once on holiday Dad took the trouble to teach me how to pray. He told me simply the story about Jesus and then we knelt at by bed and prayed. That was magic.

Luke is reminding us what our western world has forgotten - the power of the generations coming together. This clip is of a rest home and a pre-school working together.

www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/well-good/inspire-me/69442814/null

Today's Gospel is both a challenge and an encouragement. It challenges us who are older to get to know our young people: to take the time and the effort to get to know them and to share our faith with them. It challenges those of us who are younger to treasure our older ones. But it also encourages us as Anglicans because we have faith that so many find serves them for their whole lives. You can grow in it and find more and more depth.

Something magic happens when the young spend time with the old. It's a blessing for both. Joy, peace, affirmation all flow from the encounter of old with young. It's no secret. And we, the people of this church, are uniquely placed to enjoy that blessing.