Life Emphasis Service Notes
Aging Gracefully
Luke 2:25-32

The Scripture

The Old Testament Lesson: 1 Kings 2:1-4
When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son. “I am about to go the way of all the earth,” he said. “So be strong, show yourself a man, and observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go, and that the LORD may keep his promise to me: ‘If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.’”

As the believer faces the end of life on earth he focuses not on what the closing moments have in store for him but on what God desires. David knew that blessings correlated with obedience to God. The legacy he left for his son was one of obedience and devotion to the Lord God.

Responsive Psalm: Psalm 16, p.68 CW

The Epistle Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:12-18
Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.

The ability to confidently face the end of life is rooted in the conviction that death is not the end but the beginning of eternal life for the believer. Tears of sadness for the loss of a loved one are never to betray a lack of conviction that through Christ death is merely sleep, separation is temporary, and heaven is the home.

The Gospel Reading: John 11:17-27
On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was
Hope in the face of death is rooted in the conviction of a resurrection from the dead. Doubts that dead people come to life were satisfied when Christ rose from the dead. As He lives so shall all who die in the Lord.

The Sermon

The Text: Luke 2:25-32

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

The Context:
The chronology of events during the birth of Christ is subject to some speculation. The timing of the birth, the visit of the Magi, the presentation in the temple, and the exodus to Egypt are not universally agreed upon among theologians. I suggest the following:

The birth: Jesus was born some time in the spring of the year. On this point scholars seem to agree primarily because of the testimony that shepherds were in the fields (Luke 2:8). The winter was not a time for field shepherding because of the weather. While one may argue Jesus’ birth could have taken place in the summer or fall, the migration of people for the census ordered by Quirinius (Luke 2:2) logically began in the early spring when the people were best able to travel. The year is also estimated to have been between 3 and 7 B.C.

The place: Nazareth, where Joseph and his family were living, is located about 80-90 miles north of Bethlehem. Bethlehem is located some 5-8 miles south of Jerusalem. Because of the census this community quickly filled with outsiders. The result was that the stable became the evening’s lodging and the birthplace of the Savior (Luke 2:7).

Circumcision: The code required circumcision eight days after birth (Leviticus 12:2-3).

Presentation in the Temple: For a period of 33 days after the circumcision, the mother (Mary) was not permitted entrance into sacred places (Leviticus 12:4). So at a point 41 days after the birth of Jesus the family likely traveled to Jerusalem to make the required burnt and sin offerings (Leviticus 12:6-8). It was during this time that they encountered Simeon in the temple.

The Magi visit: Scripture tells us that the Magi visited Joseph and his family in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:11). We are told that they were in a home or resided in a regular lodging place rather than in a stable. While that, alone, is enough of an argument against the traditional view of the Magi at the stable, even more compelling is the reality that the Luke account placed Joseph and his family in the Jerusalem temple offering sacrifices. The Matthew account indicates that after the visit of the Magi, an angel warned Joseph of Herod’s homicidal plan to kill the Christ-child.
We are summarily told, (Matthew 2:14) “So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt.” The family remained in Egypt until the death of Herod. So it is most likely that the visit of the Magi took place after Joseph presented the offerings. Because of Bethlehem’s close proximity to Jerusalem, it is likely that after the presentation in the temple, Joseph and Mary returned to Bethlehem to rest before the planned long journey back to Nazareth. During that rest period they received the visit from the Magi, changed their plans, and went to Egypt.

Thoughts for the Introduction:
While the text is often a focused component on the nativity of Christ, its focus here shifts to the person of Simeon and his attitude about facing his own death.

The saying goes, “Two things in life are certain: death and taxes.” The reality is that as people look for creative ways to avoid paying some or any taxes, they also look upon death as something that can be and should be ignored and eventually can be avoided. For that reason, news of impending death by disease or devastating accident often causes people to face it not with Simeon’s optimism, but with anger and fear that death is betraying or cheating them.

The text offers us the opportunity to consider how all of us face the prospect of death. Each of the Scripture readings focuses on the way people faced death. It is important for us to reflect on our own mortality, its inevitability, its significance, and what lies beyond.

Terminology: Following are some buzzwords that pertain to the topic of the end of life:

- **Terminal:** A condition in which a cure is not likely and that death is the presumed outcome.
- **Futile:** Description of a treatment, process, or approach in which there is no reasonable expectation that it is going to be effective in accomplishing what is intended.
- **Despair:** A condition of hopelessness.
- **Guilt:** A feeling that one failed to meet expectations.
- **Pain Management:** Administration of therapy, psychology, and/or medication to alleviate or arrest pain.
- **Assisted Suicide:** Both the Netherlands and the state of Oregon practice legalized assisted suicide. Legalization suggests that ailing people are given the right to not only terminate their own lives but to have professional assistance in doing so, without legal ramifications for the assistant. Other states are seeking such legalization.

Focus of the Text: I recommend that the following points be extracted from the text and emphasized in the sermon:

1. Death is inevitable
2. Death can be faced positively
3. A life of faith conditions the positive response in the face of death

Simply put, growing up and nurturing faith prepares one for the challenges of faith — especially the greatest challenge faced by one’s own mortality.
Text Notes

(Luke 2:25) Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

“A man in Jerusalem called Simeon”
This setting takes place in Jerusalem. Review the notes on The Context above. The name “Simeon” belonged to one of the six children of Jacob (Israel) and Leah (along with Reuben, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun). The name presumably means “one who hears.”

“Who was righteous and devout”
A description of a person as “righteous” is first used in Scripture in Genesis 6:9: “This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.” Consistent with other uses in Scripture, a “righteous” person is both blameless (i.e. cannot be rightly faulted by others) and lives his faith with his life.

The term, “devout,” describes Simeon as a man of unwavering commitment (cf. 1 Kings 18:3; Acts 10:7; Acts 22:12). It is hard to imagine someone seen by others as both “righteous” and “devout.” His blameless nature reflects an unwavering commitment.

“The consolation of Israel”
The consolation of Israel can be understood in light of its contrast. Scripture describes it as follows:

(Micah 4:10) Writhe in agony, O Daughter of Zion, like a woman in labor, for now you must leave the city to camp in the open field. You will go to Babylon; there you will be rescued. There the LORD will redeem you out of the hand of your enemies.

The lament of Jesus over Jerusalem (Luke 13:34) reflects this turmoil into Simeon’s own time. Others, like him, longed for a restoration of Israel. The prophet Isaiah spoke of this restoration in Isaiah 52 and 53.

Was Simeon looking for a physical or spiritual consolation for Israel? I don’t believe he saw a distinction. Just like his contemporaries, I believe he was looking for both. It is clear from his words that this child was seen by Simon as more than a worldly Messiah — his comments with regard to the Gentiles indicate this point. In the absence of a clear testimony I feel it would not have been out of character for Simeon to believe in both a spiritual and physical restoration. Even those who traveled with Jesus (i.e. his disciples) were confused about this issue (Luke 24:13-31).

“The Holy Spirit was upon him”
The Holy Spirit is referenced by that name only three times in the Old Testament (Psalm 51:11; Isaiah 63:10; Isaiah 63:11). The “Spirit of God” is the more common usage, especially in the Old Testament.

How is the phrase, “the Holy Spirit was upon him,” to be understood? Simply put, it indicates that Simeon’s walk in life was more than natural — it was supernatural. That does not suggest he performed incredible miracles or did unimaginable feats. Rather, his walk in life was that of a person of faith. Knowing that true faith is the most unnatural thing in life (cf. Hebrews 11:1), we
are told Simeon lived his life of faith. He blindly accepted the things of God, regardless of how popular or logical those things may or may not seem. To describe Simeon, and what he was about to say, the Apostle could well have used the words: (2 Peter 1:21) “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” Simeon walked by faith and spoke from a heart of faith moved by the working of the Holy Spirit.

(Luke 2:26) *It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.*

“*Revealed to him by the Holy Spirit*”
These were extraordinary times. The revelation of Scripture existed only from the Old Testament, and written copies were limited. God’s direct communication with people was still taking place (cf. Saul on the road to Damascus, Acts 9). We are not told, however, how God the Holy Spirit directly communicated to Simeon. In faith Simeon accepted the revelation from God and patiently waited for the young couple to bring their child and their offerings.

“*He would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ*”
Simeon was preparing for two things in life: 1) to see the Christ, and 2) to face his own death. Through his faith Simeon was preparing for an end to his earthly pilgrimage. His desire to see the Savior reflected the curiosity of any believer who wants to gaze upon the face of God (cf. Exodus 33:18-20). As a man of faith Simeon was waiting for this critical phase in God’s plan of salvation.

“Christ” is the Greek word for the Hebrew word, “Messiah,” which means “the anointed One.” This child is the Lord’s Christ, that is, He is the Lord’s choice, set aside for a special purpose. This is the One whom believers waited for since the fall into sin. Yes, Simeon very much wanted to see this child.

(Luke 2:27) *Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, . . .*

“*Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts*”
It is clear God did more than merely reveal things to Simeon. He was the guiding force in Simeon’s life. Simeon received the directive from God to be in the right place at the right time to experience an incredible thing.

“*to do for him what the custom of the Law required*”
See the discussion under “The Context” for comments on the requirements of the law.

(Luke 2:28-29) *Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace.”*

“Sovereign Lord”
As theologians debated whether to accept usage of the NIV translation of the Bible I recall that the term “Sovereign Lord” was often disputed as a “reformed” translation. Although I am more than being willing to challenge the “reformed” approach to some portions of Scripture, I am rather fond of the term “sovereign” in this passage. God’s sovereignty is His ultimate authority over all things. Many of the prophecies of the birth of Christ and the nativity itself express this
sovereignty. God’s reminder of autonomy is expressed in such portions of Scripture as Isaiah 55:8 and 2 Peter 3:8ff. His reminders to Job (Job 38) further express this sovereignty. A heart of faith that confesses “thy will be done” is a heart that understands and accepts the sovereignty of the Lord.

“As you have promised”
This refers to what is recorded in verse 26. Because God said it, it was certain to happen. It was a promise (cf. Psalm 145:13).

“Now dismiss your servant in peace”
This is an important phrase to consider for this particular sermon. The lord “dismissing” one to death is consistent with His revelation in Deuteronomy 32:39: “See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand.”

God is often spoken as the Author of Life, but he is also the Terminator of Life. The psalmist reflected that conviction when he said: (Psalm 31:15) “My times are in your hands.” As Job mourned the loss of his children he indicated this same conviction (Job 1:21). Even David’s prayers for the life of his child born of his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba indicated his understanding of God’s authority over life and death (2 Samuel 12:15-23).

Equally important is Simeon’s description of himself as a “servant” of God. His view of his life, his chance to hold the Christ-child, and his own death are all defined within the context of his role as a servant of God. As such, every believer is a servant of God, seeking to understand and do His will. Consider how the Apostle Paul viewed the believer’s life: (Philippians 3:10-14) “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

If you keep this passage in mind and consider the prime directive for Christian living from 1 Corinthians 10:31, one can easily surmise that life is to be spent in total pursuit of the things of God. Paul once described life in this world as a partial and imperfect experience (1 Corinthians 13); heaven in contrast is the perfect experience. That being the case, in heaven we are told the saints serve God day and night (Revelation 7:15). Therefore, life in this world is the complete servitude to God. Like Paul, we often fail in that pursuit though it never negates the pursuit. We “strive” (1 Timothy 4:10), we “struggle” (Ephesians 6:12), we “fight” (1 Timothy 6:12), and we “beat” (1 Corinthians 9:27) all in the name of living the perfection we enjoy by faith in Christ.

Each person who carries with him the name of Christ is a servant. His life is to be solely and entirely devoted to Him. It is not a calling simply for the pastors and teachers of our Christian schools. It is the calling of all believers who carry with them the membership of the “priesthood of all believers.” As each of us measures our days we view our lives not in personal pursuit of pleasure and worldly gain but in service of God. We confidently face death knowing it is the time the Sovereign God determines that our servitude on earth is complete.

An important passage to consider in this context is: (Philippians 1:21-26) “For to me, to live is
Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me."

Is it ever wrong to “wish for death?” It is clear that Paul desired death and wanted to be with God. Circumstances likely compelled this confession. In the earlier verses of this chapter Paul talks about being in chains and suffering for the sake of the Gospel. He was obviously facing some sort of punishment in which death had an increased appeal. Yet, there is a difference between longing for death and making it happen. One cannot usurp God’s authority over life and death even for the noble cause of being with God. Paul recognized that although he longed for death and the eternal life in heaven it would bring, it was more necessary for him to remain on earth.

As some consider their own mortality and/or health issues, they question the diminishing value of their life. They ask themselves, “What’s the use?” While there is no obligation to pursue futile treatment, there is an obligation to protect and preserve life. In Paul’s case he saw the value in his ability to continue to proclaim Christ. That may be a great reason to keep on living, but it is not the only one. God permits high quality and low quality lives to continue for a variety of purposes. Consider the story of the rich man and poor Lazarus (Luke 16:19ff). Look at the account of the man lying in the ditch left in a suffering or near fatal condition (Luke 10:30ff). In both instances the diminished quality of life was contrasted with high qualities of life. They represent opportunities for people to express their faith. We are not told that those who suffered could necessarily spread the gospel. Rather, even in their diminished condition God has a point to make and had presented to others who should know better an opportunity to reflect their faith and values.

Simeon accomplished a personal goal in life in being able to hold the Christ-child. His conviction that life rested in the hands of its Creator is undeniable and worth exemplifying.

(Luke2:30-32) For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

This passage contains the gospel joy. This beautiful description of the Savior provides hope for all people. Jesus came for Jews and Gentiles. His salvation was not restricted to a race, though His own people could rejoice in this unique honor given to them. God loved the world (John 3:16) and for a brief moment in time Simeon held this promised hope for all the world.

Gospel Application

The salvation that was brought by Christ is the sieve through which all of life’s experiences must pass. Everything finds its value and meaning within that context. Death of a believer holds no cause for carrying on like the rest of the world without hope (1 Thessalonians 4:12-18). Lives of varying quality still find purpose, meaning, and hope in the light of Christ’s sacrifice for sin. All of the human existence must be contextualized within the framework of our relationship with God. Before Him we were dead in our transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1). In His presence we could do nothing to earn our perfection (Isaiah 64:6). Yet, the sinless One became sin for us so that we might be saved (2 Corinthians 5:21). Our finite minds are accentuated by our limited earthly existence. We Christians can bravely and confidently face death knowing that life on earth
is only a minuscule moment within the context of eternity. The idea of “eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we may die” is pleasing for the moment, but apart from Christ it is a high price to pay for an eternity of judgment.

**Practical Applications in Sanctification**
Encourage families to talk about death. Some family members talk as though they don’t want be a burden. Perhaps you need to discuss the fact that being a burden is not a sin and that being able to carry a burden is God-pleasing and strengthens our character.

Discuss the end-stage Alzheimer’s patient whose existence seems futile. Point out that the sacrifices made to care for that family member may be for the benefit of the family, not the patient. Perhaps God has something to teach us in that regard. Maybe it isn’t even the family. Perhaps it is a nurse, doctor, or orderly who sees the sacrificial compassion of a family that clings to life not as something that can’t be lost but as something that is to be cared for and comforted. They may observe the good works and be prompted to ask where the hope and stamina comes from. The family can then witness to their own convictions about life, death, and eternal life in Christ (Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 3:15).

A comment might wish to be made is that some people do not know how to die — and I am talking about some Christians. A notice of impending death burdens the consciences of family members for past transgressions. Others see it as a time to “spread their misery” around. This is a time to prepare people, not so much for our own deaths but for their deaths. Caring for a passing parent is a prelude to their own passing. Word of our impending death is cause for us to demonstrate our faith and share it with those around us so that in our courage they may learn.

Your goal is to bring the subject of death to the forefront for your listeners that they may count their remaining days and moments. While emotionally we may seek to encourage us to cherish our time together, it is more important to cherish the opportunity life gives us to serve God. The fact that we enjoy the warm and cozy moments of family, loved ones, and friends is an added blessing but is not the essence of Christian living.

**Sample Theme and Parts**
**I am Ready**
I. I know the Lord
II. I know what waits
III. I accept His timetable

**Facing the End**
I. Confidently
II. In submission

**Know how to die**
I. As God’s servant
II. As a member of the family
III. As a member of the community