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## **Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Psalm 148; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40**

In the name of God: Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Amen.

Here's an out-of-the-mouths-of-babes kind of story. There was a priest who had been offering a series of children's sermons on the symbols of the church. He had already talked about the cross, the altar and the chalice. This particular Sunday the priest was speaking about vestments and asked the question, "Why do you think I wear this collar?" There was at first no answer. Then a little boy raised his hand and said: "Because it kills fleas and ticks for up to 5 months." A warning not to take ourselves too seriously.

Today, I believe the gospel is calling us to think about two things: What we want to do before we die and leave as a legacy; the importance of generations coming together. These themes are related.

What do you think you must do before you die? What is on your bucket list? Is it travel? Is it a new career? Is a much-needed reconciliation before it's too late? Is there someone who needs to hear, "I love you?" What can you or must you do while there is still time? How do you want to be remembered?

I read about something recently called an **Ethical Will**. It is apparently a way to share what is important to you with your family and friends. In fact, it can be a legacy of love and a spiritual gift for your loved ones to remember you by. Many people think about writing an Ethical Will when they are nearing the end of life. Ideally, such wills should be an ongoing practice.

Think about what you wish you knew about your parents, grandparents, and other ancestors. For example, why did they uproot their lives to emigrate from one country to another or from one area of this country to another, such as the pioneers who endured hardships to settle the West in the United States? What personal experiences had the greatest impact on their lives? Those are the types of things about yourself that you can share with your own descendants and friends.

If you knew ahead of time when your life was going to end, what words of wisdom and comfort would you want to leave for your family?

Many years ago, I determined that I would be a writer, a published writer. I was fortunate enough to have a few small items published, and then, with children and a job, I got away from it, but writing is still up there on my bucket list. Now that I have more discretionary time, I would like to take up writing again. It's really hard now to make myself sit and write. A well-known and published writer once wisely said, "If you want to be a writer, you actually have to write." So, I'm working on that.

In today's gospel there is a man whose name is Simeon. Simeon seemed to have only one thing on his bucket list: to see God's salvation before he departs in peace.

There is an old woman in today's gospel whose name is Anna. She's a talkative sort. She begins to praise God aloud. She strikes up conversations with perfect strangers nearby. She brags about this baby Jesus as though he were her own grandchild. In the baby Jesus she sees

something special: this child will be the start of a new exodus, a fresh redemption for God's captive people.

Some in the crowd have recognized her. She's Anna, the daughter of Phanuel; she is eighty-four years old. That's not such a great age for where I live at Westminster-Canterbury. Anna's been a widow longer than most of the visitors to the temple have been alive. And pious! She may even live at the temple; she prays and fasts all the time.

At the center of all this is the child. Jesus is mentioned by name only once, in verse 27. Otherwise, he is referred to as "the child." According to Luke, the savior of the world was born in a stable, while another 'savior' of the world, Caesar, sits on the splendor of the Roman throne. Jesus' parents bring the offering designated for the poor: two turtledoves. They cannot afford the larger animals for sacrifice. This child, Jesus, born in poverty, is God's consolation and redemption. We are left in anticipation to watch as the child grows strong, filled with wisdom and blessed with the favor of God.

As the scene closes, the young couple with the baby, who is destined for greatness, leaves the temple to return to Galilee. We don't know much about Jesus' growing up years.

The next several years of their lives back home at Nazareth of Galilee will be quiet and uneventful as far as we know. But I think they won't forget that day in Jerusalem when they met Anna and Simeon. And neither should we.

The strange scene in the temple brings together a baby, a young couple, and a pair of old people.

Imagine a world where younger adults are not constantly overwhelmed by the duties of daily existence, but go to worship, where they are surprised and transformed by God's loving intentions for them.

Imagine a world where older adults find purpose and direction, where they listen for some word to speak to the next generation, in keeping with what they wish to leave behind and anticipate God calling them home someday.

Imagine a world where every child is welcomed and treated as important in God's plan, regarded as a precious revelation, a sign that God remembers us for good.

You and I live in a world where children may be overlooked or neglected, or worse, abused. Younger adults feel overwhelmed with no time to tend their spiritual needs and older adults often have no useful place. It's a world that's out of joint.

But today, in our gospel, a young couple brings their baby to Jerusalem, and in the temple meets an old woman and an old man.

We are given a pattern we can live out and promote where older adults, younger adults, and children all have honored places with each other. And why can't we make that pattern come true here in the world where we live?

Many of you know our Callie – our red-haired three-year-old. She loves to come to church. She sometimes sits in the choir with me and she has even been observed singing. She knew, when she was two, that there is something holy about the vestments worn by John, Julia, and Marguerite. Callie spends a day and a night with me once a week where I live. She brings smiles to everyone she meets at Westminster-Canterbury. There is one woman, from whom I have never been able to coax a smile. But when she sees Callie, her face is transformed.

We visit people at the Hoy Center which is our health care facility. They have large fluffy bunny rabbits on each floor, so we have to play with the bunnies. Then we go out to the pond in the Tuttle Courtyard and take Isabel and Peggy, the two large turtles, out for a little walk.

Westminster-Canterbury is a place where young and old can be together and honor each other. We can all do this by creating our own temples when we bring together people of all ages. We do this well at Emmanuel.

I feel deeply honored to be able to share my time on earth with my great-granddaughter, who is truly a gift from God. For 24 hours a week she wears me out, and part of me is relieved to take her home. When I get rested, I can't wait to see her again. Spending time with her will continue to be on my bucket list.

Although I was born in the "children should be seen and not heard" and the "spare the rod and spoil the child" generation, I am grateful to the older people in my life. My parents divorced and yet I was greatly loved by a lot of family. I went through a period of terrible anxiety, and I fought against the people who were trying to teach me about the world. I think, the very act of rebellion of the young can set the stage for growth or heartbreak. I was fortunate to have come out on the other side of my growing-up years with some resilience.

Today, as in no other time in history, there can be four generations trying to work together in the church, in families, as well as in the workplace. We have the veterans, like me, the baby boomers, Gen X and Gen Y. Each generation has its own strengths and challenges. In our church, we are very fortunate that generations can meet separately and together. Older adults need the energy and fresh ideas of those who are younger. The younger generations have the opportunity to listen to the wisdom of those who are older. What a wonderful mix we can be when we are willing to be both speakers and listeners!

So...when you make your Ethical Will, what will you leave as a legacy for those who will come after you? Who will you say has been important in your life?

The following is the philosophy of Charles Schulz, the creator of the "Peanuts" comic strip. See if you can answer the following questions:

1. Name the five wealthiest people in the world.
2. Name the last five Heisman trophy winners.
3. Name the last five winners of the Miss America contest.
4. Name ten people who have won the Nobel or Pulitzer Prize.
5. Name the last half dozen Academy Award winners for best actor and actress.
6. Name the last decade's World Series winners.

I got a zero on those questions.

Here's another quiz. See how you do on this one:

1. List a few teachers who helped your journey through school.
2. Name three friends who have helped you through a difficult time.
3. Name five people who have taught you something worthwhile.
4. Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated and special.
5. Think of five people you enjoy spending time with.

I imagine you can answer those questions as well as I did.

From Isaiah today: *and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give.* If I am to leave an ethical will, for those who come after me, I will need to accept the name that God has given me. I believe that God has given me the name of disciple. He has given you that name too, no matter what age or generation you are. We must all rest securely in who we are as charges of Christ, those who care deeply about others, identities forged by redemption and forgiveness and not by failure, by Jesus' goodness, rather than our own. If we can do that, then we will leave an enduring legacy. Nothing will undermine our strength and love. We are who we are, all generations, by virtue of what God is working through us. Amen