

**May I speak this morning in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.**

I have been thinking about age a lot recently. Perhaps it is because I am in my sixtieth year and lucky to be currently negotiating and calculating my semi-retirement from my paid employment.

A friend who is the same age as me recently said: “Do you remember that the words ‘Snap, Crackle and Pop’ used to remind you of your breakfast cereal? Rather than the noise your body makes when you get out of bed.”

One of my friends Andrew, with whom I studied, is South African. He tells me that almost everyone in South Africa has a Nelson Mandela story. The stories tell of his kindness and sincerity to all.

Nelson Mandela achieved his lifelong goal when he was 72 years old. However, he spent a long time waiting.

Indeed, he spent 28 years in prison, waiting for the time to be right, when his nation could be set free. He had lived in hope of seeing a new dawn! His autobiography is called the “Long Walk to Freedom.”

On a more mundane level, when thinking about age, Colonel Sanders didn’t start Kentucky Fried Chicken until he was 61

The famous writer JRR Tolkein didn’t write the “Lord of the Rings” until he was 62.

Ronald Reagan became president of the USA at the age of 69.

Simeon and Anna aren't mentioned in the bible until they are well past retirement age. They burst onto the scenes.... I imagine them in the Temple with their Zimmer frames, announcing that the baby before them will be the one to change the world. Simeon - we are told nothing of his age - only that he has been told by God that he won't see death until he has seen the Messiah.

He utters that beautiful prayer known as the Nunc Dimittis: "Now Master you can let your servant go in peace according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation." He had waited all those years and now at last he saw his dream fulfilled.

The prophet Anna - we are told - was "of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of 84." She had probably waited 60 years or so to get her chance to tell the world about the arrival of Jesus.

Both these characters prove it is never too late to tell people about the good news of Jesus.

Both these two characters are those who might be written off today as "past it" - yet it is **they** who tell the whole Temple who Jesus is.

We all know people who are older yet manage to do great things.

At the opposite end of the age spectrum, there are examples of people achieving great things early in life. Malala Yusefzai was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize at the age of 17, the youngest person ever.

More recently a 16 year-old young woman Greta Thumberg was named as Newsweek's person of the year. Whether you agree with her or not, climate change now figures in most global forums.

By the age of just 28, Dickens was on his fourth novel.

At 28 Paul McCartney had left the Beatles after over a decade of fame.

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At the age of thirty another young man we all know, began his public ministry.

So, imagine if you can that moment in the Temple when these two older people, Simeon and Anna pick up a small baby and say: "This is the light to lighten the gentiles and the glory of your people Israel."

We live in a society that can write people off for being too old or too young.

But we follow a God who never writes people off.

We follow a God who calls Abraham in his 90s.

In one of my favourite bible stories, God calls Samuel to serve him when he's a little lad - a mere "bairn".

We follow a God who leaves Moses wandering round for 40 years working as a shepherd, before calling him at 80 years old to tell Pharaoh "let my people Go". The same God who calls the boy king Josiah at the age of eight to lead the biggest religious renewal in the Old Testament, a bit like Malala.

Here in our church we are particularly blessed to have quite a few youngsters.

Many of them are over 70, 80 or even in their 90s! Let's give thanks for who we have here - because for God you are never too young and never too old.

This is at the heart of my faith - I believe in the God who believes in us - the God who knows that we are never too young and never too old, the God who, if we will let him, will use us, whoever we are - even here in Jesmond - to do amazing things.

So, as we celebrate this holy feast of Candlemas and as our commemoration of Christmas finally comes to an end for another year, let us remember that God may keep us waiting, but his promise of life in abundance will surely come to us all.

Let's enjoy the waiting... Our God is a faithful God, who has promised us light in the darkness. Like Simeon and Anna, let's be brave to share his light with others. So, don't hold back. Light the candles, not just today, but at every opportunity we can. As one translation of John's gospel says: "His life is the light that shines through the darkness—and the darkness can never extinguish it". Let's not be shy in sharing that good news with the world.

**Amen**