

Monday March 22

Luke 2:22-40 – keep watching

22 When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord

23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”),

24 and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”

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.

26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.

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,

28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

29 “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace.

30 For my eyes have seen your salvation,

31 which you have prepared in the sight of all people,

32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

33 The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him.

34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against,

35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

36 There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,

37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.

38 Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

39 When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth.

40 And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

You can think of the bible as a story unfolding over many centuries. In the cast list we have some major characters and we also have a large supporting cast. Some of these are really attractive: two of them we find in Luke’s Gospel chapter 2, which tells us about Mary and Joseph taking the young Jesus to the Jerusalem temple. Simeon and Anna appear. Anna is well into her eighties; we aren’t told how old Simeon is, but I get the impression that he’s no chicken either. They rejoice when they see Jesus; they recognise him as the Messiah they’ve been longing for. I also get the impression that Luke wants us to know that they’ve been waiting for this moment for a long time.

Telling us that we need to persevere with pandemic restrictions is all well and good; there’s real encouragement, though, when you can see PERSEVERANCE at work in real lives – like Simeon and Anna. Some of the bright moments in the past year have been provided by people – sometimes old people – who’ve demonstrated it to us. Take the late Captain Sir Tom Moore: walking up and down his garden 100 times to raise a few thousand pounds for the National Health Service. He captured imaginations so much that the total quickly topped £30 million. He inspired other frail older folk to similar feats of endurance.

Then I think of a younger man: the rugby league player Kevin Sinfield, running seven marathons in seven days back in December, enduring the most appalling weather on the way, to raise £77,777 for research into motor neurone disease, as a tribute to his friend and team mate Rob Burrow. By the time he had finished his seventh run the total was over £1 million, and has since more than doubled.

Then there's Abraham Lincoln. What a disastrous career. Two business failures, a nervous breakdown, 8 defeats in various elections. In 1860 he became President of the United States of America.

We all need examples to inspire us. There are some among people we know and plenty of others in the news. And as we journey through Lent towards Holy Week and Easter, there's Jesus, our supreme example of PERSEVERANCE. I'm going to let the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews have the last word today. Read the whole letter and it becomes clear that he was concerned about a Christian congregation who were faltering on their Christian journey. This is what he said:

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."