

- So it's been less than a week since we celebrated the birth of Jesus.
- It might seem a little strange then to be speaking already of his death.
 - Surely, we could linger a little longer in the warm glow of our Christmas celebrations.
 - Good Friday will come soon enough.
 - Let us not rush forward to meet it.
- But that is where our Gospel reading takes us this morning.
- Simeon's prophetic words to Mary sum up much of the story that is to come.
 - "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed--and a sword will pierce your own soul too."
- In those words, Simeon points to the opposition and conflict that Jesus' words and actions will inspire and the grief that his mother will experience when that opposition and conflict result in Jesus' death.
- There is then in our Gospel story today a foreshadowing of what is to come,
 - an acknowledgment of future pain.
- But there is also in that same gospel a profound sense of celebration and rejoicing that puts Jesus' death and our own death in its proper place.
- Now, none of this is meant to diminish death or its effects.
- Sorrow, pain, and grief are not things that we bear lightly.
- Death is always a loss,
 - and it is a loss borne most heavily by those who are left behind.
- We don't know what those who die experience in the moment of their death, but we can speak with some authority about what happens to us when they die.
 - Most of us are acquainted with sorrow.
 - And we cannot be glib about that.
- But there is still a need for us to put death in its place.
- And the truth about death, as we know it, is that it is not the end.
- It is *an* end, surely, but it is not *the* end.
- And, as people of faith and hope and love, we know this.

- As people who live in the light of Jesus' resurrection, we know this
- Death is never the end of God's purposes nor is it a curtailment of God's power.
- And this is what we hear in the words of Simeon:
 - "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."
- Simeon has laid eyes upon Jesus.
 - He has held him in his arms.
- And Jesus' name means "God saves".
- So Simeon has encountered in a very tangible way the fulfilment of God's promise,
 - God's promise of salvation in the person of Jesus.
- He has held that promise in his arms.
 - And that is enough for him.
- Simeon can die in peace because he knows that God's purpose is alive and active in the world.
- And even in the knowledge of what is to come - conflict, grief and loss - he can still die in peace, at peace, because God has been faithful to him.
- God promised him that he would see the Lord's Messiah and now he has.
- He can die in peace in the knowledge that beyond all that he has done or not done God's purpose continues.
 - God will continue to be active in the world after he has died.
- And in that way the power of God transcends death,
 - transcends our death.
- But, of course, there is more than that.
- It is not just that God will keep going after we die.
- It is not just that we can die in peace knowing that God will bring about the promise of the fulfilment of God's purpose.
- It is not just that our part in the play is done and we can retire to the wings knowing that the story goes on.
- I believe that the truth is that God is never done with us.

- And the full truth, the full meaning, of the peace that Simeon experiences and the peace that is also ours is that we are never apart from God's purpose and God's presence.
- We may only be able to speak with any sort of authority about the human condition as we experience it between life and death.
- All else that happens after death may be speculation, at least in the details, but we are all the children of the resurrection.
- We are all heirs to the promise of life beyond death that is at the heart of the resurrection.
- And I think you have heard me say before that death comes in many forms:
 - physical death, certainly,
 - but also the death of hope,
 - the death of our dreams,
 - the death of joy,
 - the passing of the world of our youth.
- All of us will experience death in those ways.
- But the promise of the resurrection is that those deaths are never the end.
 - There is always life to be had on the other side of those things.
- Because God is not done with us.
 - God is never done with us.
- God will always be doing a thing with us.
- In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us.
 - God is always with us.
- And that is the ground of our hope:
 - from one moment to the next,
 - from one day to another,
 - from the year that has been to the year that is to come.
- God is with us.
 - God is always with us.