

Simeon, Anna and the 'Assisted Dying' Bill

Not much of late has had the power to disturb our emotions more than the 'assisted dying' bill. Those of us in our 8th, 9th or 10th decade of life are particularly aware of limited time left and wonder how our life may end. The discussions around the bill may have alarmed you more than you imagined they would, whether you are for or against the bill. We now face difficult questions and decisions in our later years.

As we journey through Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, we come to Candlemas and the story of Simeon and Anna (*Luke 2*). They were at the end of their lives when they recognised the baby Jesus as Christ and broadcast the good news in the Temple. They show us that God has a purpose for us in old age and infirmity.



People feel strongly about the 'rights' and also the 'dangers' of 'assisted dying'. Every human story affects us emotionally, and we all wish we could protect our loved ones from pain of any sort. However, pain is integral to love, from birth, through life, and in dying. Being beside someone in their pain is a Godly gift; allowing someone to care for you is a Godly grace. Being 'a burden' is not something God will acknowledge.

We are never a 'burden' in the eyes of God; nor should we ever be seen as a burden to others: – to imagine we are a burden is to devalue what God has created. We are not commodities with a 'sell by' date: we are each made in God's image and God can speak through us and use us to shed light to others, whatever age we are and in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. St Paul was wise when he said: 'Give thanks to God in all circumstances' – for God is there in all circumstances, and 'God is with us' even in dying, however fearful we may feel.

Is now a time and opportunity to talk about the issues which trouble us? – within families, or with friends, or at church? Setting up a Simeon and Anna Group – to talk about end-of-life issues – to share concerns and hopes - could be a helpful, reassuring and life-giving initiative.

'Do not let your hearts be troubled, neither be afraid: trust in God, trust also in me; I go to prepare a place for you'.. 'I am with you until the end of time.'

(John 14.1-3 / Matthew 28.20)