

Let's face it. London is different.

And before you start on the 'well how would I know, I'm just a simple country girl' thing, unless you've motored in from an isolated hamlet in the Surrey Hills today (and there aren't any), since 1966 London is where you live and move and have your being. And anyway, if you say 'I'm from Surrey' people don't think 'how posh' which is what you imagine they think. They think Surrey: cul-de-sac in Croydon complete with burnt out car and abandoned sofa.

So London. Your home. It is different.

People in London tend to vote in more sane, compassionate and welcoming ways than the rest of the country, even if the L B Sutton occasionally has unfortunate senior moments when it gets into the polling booth.

Londoners are extremely considerate of their neighbour's privacy, something you can't say about any villagers anywhere. Londoners are extremely considerate of their neighbour's privacy which is why they don't know their neighbour's name and never talk to them.

London drivers are the most accurate in the world: after 20 minutes waiting at the road works traffic lights they have calculated precisely the speed and trajectory they need to follow when the amber light appears, and can execute the ensuing formula one-speed manoeuvre a mere 3 millimetres away from the rear bumper of the car in front.

London time is more valuable than any other time: that's why nobody ever has any time to give to you. And yet there's a supply and demand paradox worthy of a whole 60 minutes of Professor Brian Cox soft-focus simpering there, because there is a lot more time in London than anywhere else- in this country certainly, and probably in the world. London minutes are like country miles: they're just so much longer than you expect.

I know you don't believe me- you never do- so let me demonstrate with a simple example, (actually let's pretend we're in Surrey and call it a thought experiment) from everyday experience.

A member of your family is coming to visit from the provinces. You're not quite sure what their estimated time of arrival is, but all of a sudden, there's a call on the phone and there's your mum/nephew/sister saying we're five minutes away according to the satnav, almost there, put the kettle on, I'm dying for a cup of tea. What do you do? Do you rush into the kitchen set the copper kettle on the stove because you know they like their tea good and strong like all northerners do and that takes time you don't now have all the while wondering when you slipped into a time warp and what happened to the electric kettle you usually use? Do you? Of course not. Faced with an ETA five minutes gagging for a cuppa message, what you don't do is put the kettle on. What you *do* do is run yourself a bath, read the newspaper, take that bath, then take the dog for a walk, give the dog a bath, clean the bathroom up because you've got guests coming then give yourself a good 15 minutes to rearrange the cushions ready for your visitors. You know this is the best course of action because if anyone ever rings you in London to say they're five minutes away, they haven't converted to London time and five London minutes is all the time in the world. If they ring you and say they'll be half an hour you know they're never going to get there at all.

Time goes at different speeds we all know that, and, bitterest of ironies, the less you have of it left the quicker it goes. This is why it is a really good idea to spend lots of time in church listening to sermons: time goes so slowly when you're listening to somebody preaching that you're in effect squeezing the maximum amount possible out of the precious few minutes you have. The easy way to live a longer life. You could probably get all your homework done in the time it takes me to get to the end of what I'm today, if only you'd thought to bring it with you, and you were still at school.

You could do that because you're listening to a sermon, and listening to it in the London Borough of Sutton and London minutes are longer than any other minutes.

If only.

You are no doubt dying to point out to me that the London Minutes phenomenon is simply a side effect of the fact that an average journey in London is now slower than in the days when the only method of transport was a cart drawn by a team of steam powered snails and indeed, Londoners can spend so much time travelling- to and from work, to and from school, to and from the doctors, to and from church (I wish)- that they always appear to be stressed, in a hurry and trying desperately to find time they don't have to do the things they need, want and like to do. And as this is the 21st century, we all know now that you only live once, life's too short and

there's not a lot of time and as we've only got a finite amount of it, the best way to spend that time when you can grab a bit of it to yourself is to fill it with as much as you possibly can. Miss nothing, try everything (at least) once, get going on your bucket list, don't hold back and live life to the full. Cram as many experiences as you can in there and for maximum effect select them to be as intense as they can be.

Well, possibly. Perhaps a full life is the way to have and fulfilling life. Or perhaps that is a way to fill the emptiness of living with the uneasy happiness of wanderlust, lose the sense that we're falling in a chasm of pointlessness with the joy of the chase which lasts only as long as the pursuit does, and then it's on to the next. Whatever the reality, fill it up is the life model we seem, increasingly, to be choosing. Lots of people do. Most of us feel, at least some of the time that that is how we should be living life, afraid that we might be missing the point and missing out, and so that's what we choose.

But there is an alternative. We could choose the example of Simeon and Anna, that crusty couple we meet in the Gospel this morning.

Anna had got all the things that women on the cusp of BC/AD were supposed to do to have full and fulfilling lives out of the way early (basically, get married). And then she spent the rest of her time in the Temple. Not much of a slogan: YOLO! Let's go to church.

And Simeon. Simeon had a grand total of one item on his bucket list. That's so pathetic you may as well give up before you've started. Even being more polite, that's not really a list. One item does not make a litany. And instead of getting out there, grabbing life by the horns and riding it for all he was worth, he waited for what was on his list for an entire lifetime. Old fool. Loser. Even in the first century, a very different age indeed, that's what we'd have said. Except, Simeon's dream was the one thing, the only thing on any bucket list, ever, that was actually worth it.

And when he got it, when he finally got what he'd been waiting for, Simeon's joy was that he could now stop. It wasn't onto the next one, back to the top for one more turn on the helter-skelter of experience. The moment Simeon has finally seen God's salvation is the moment he can finally let go.

Of course, it's not supposed to be like that. You're supposed to fight it all the way, rage against the dying of the light, battling till you drop. And never, ever let go.

Christianity is not a faith ideally suited to our instant gratification generation. Probably that's why, in this country at least, the past 50 years has been a story of relentless decline. It's not hard to see why. At most our faith seems to consist of holding on, waiting a bit, listening very carefully to what is almost always silence and finally, ultimately trusting God enough to let go. And nobody wants to let go. Nobody wants to let go of our desperate attempts to control our own destiny, our urgent, anxious longing to fill our lives with meaning with bigger better more intense experience, nobody can bring themselves to trust God enough to go gently into the good night.

The world view, so prevalent, that is encapsulated in the very idea of the bucket list gives us the illusion that we are in control of our lives: this is what I want to do, working my way through it, this is what I am doing, in control. But it is an illusion. None of us are ever really in control of our lives, and try as we might it is not what we do that gives meaning to them. What gives our lives meaning, purpose, control, a direction and a destination, is to follow that kindly light; what gives every minute and every life eternity is God. And it is that God, brought to the Temple by his parents, that Simeon and Anna meet today. Let us pray that we too, like them, have the courage to let go and place our lives into the hands of God.