

Sermon for April 26, the Fourth Sunday of Easter

Grace to you and peace from God our father
and our Lord Jesus Christ.

This sermon by Pastor Vince Gerhardy is actually for the 5th Sunday of Easter, entitled "**The 4-B Club**", based on John 14:2 and Isaiah 46:4.

Texts: John 14:2b

Jesus said, *"I am going to prepare a place for you"*.

Isaiah 46:4

"I am your God and will take care of you until you are old and your hair is gray. I made you and will care for you; I will give you help and rescue you".

Pastor Vince Gerhardy talks about a congregation that has a 'group' of elderly people. I think we have somewhat more than just 'a group', but, you can decide for yourself.

A congregation has a group for elderly people. It meets in the church hall every two weeks and is well attended. It's a great time of fellowship and encouraging one another. It's called the Four-B Club. A newcomer to the group asked: why is it called the Four-B Club? The answer is simple: The four Bs stand for Baldness (not there yet), Bifocals (got that beat – trifocals!), Bunions (nope), and Bulge (thinking of getting one of those mirrors that make you look tall and thin!).

Growing older is something that affects every person on this planet, from the tiniest baby to the oldest person. Some of you are a long way from being a senior member of our society, but time will go fast and next thing you, too, will be wondering where the years have gone. We are all heading for the Four-B Club, that's if we are not already there. God created time when He created day and night, the seasons, and the years. God created the days and years, and said that it was very good.

But this good creation of God was affected when sin came into the world, through the disobedience of the first man and woman. The passing of time began to have a negative effect on God's creation. People, and all things in this world, began to show the signs of age. Time has been ticking away, and everything you can see, and feel, and touch, has been getting older. The process of aging that we are all familiar with changes people, animals, and plants to the point that they became weak, and eventually died.

In Psalm 90, the writer compares the shortness of human life to God, who is from everlasting to everlasting. He says, "*Seventy years is all we have— eighty years, if we are strong; yet all they bring us is trouble and sorrow; life is soon over, and we are gone*" (Psalm 90:10). Then the psalmist is quick to explain why our life is so short. It's because of sin. Death is God's judgement on sin, and the brevity of our life has been brought about, because of our rebellion against God.

The effect that time has on people, is really obvious to us when we meet up with a family member or friend we haven't seen for some time. We can hardly believe our eyes at the changes that have occurred. The children are all so grown up, the parents have aged, and perhaps put on a little weight, their hair has a touch of gray, or they have changed because of sickness, or some other distressing time. Others find the same about us. As the saying goes, "Time doesn't stand still for anyone"; we are all getting older. And like good wine, getting better!

As we journey through life, there are significant moments that remind us that with age, come changes in our lifestyles. We realize that a certain part of our life is gone, never to be recaptured or relived. For instance, graduation, the day you completed your schooling, may have been a day of rejoicing! But later, you realize that it marked the end of a part of your life, that will never be repeated. What about the day your last child left home, and you wonder where all the years have gone (that's after you get through celebrating freedom!). Or what about the day you retired, realising that what you had done over so many years, was now finished (or not – just changing).

There are those defining moments when we realise that things will be different from now on. The passing of time has seen to that.

What can we do about this? Some people, over the years, have searched for the 'fountain of youth' or something similar, that will wind back the clock, and give them extended youthfulness. Some try to slow down the aging process with face-lifts, pills, and potions that will give them a 'fresh face' look. In our youth-oriented culture, some people have a fear of looking old. While some of us are having too much fun, and just don't care!

The Greeks called the fear of old age 'geraphobia'. Those who have geraphobia want to live longer and never grow old. In fact, some people are highly insulted if reference is made to how old they look. To some degree, we all suffer from geraphobia. We fear that one day we might end up in a nursing home, unable to feed ourselves or control our bodily functions, or developing dementia, and not able to remember anything, and maybe not even to recognise our family when they come to visit.

When the fear of growing old grips our hearts, or we see what getting older is doing to our bodies, or we see what age is doing to those whom we love, how do we handle this? How can we see our aging in a positive way, and growing older, as something meaningful and acceptable?

Let me start in this way. If you visit areas with deciduous trees during winter, you would find that the trees lose their leaves, and their branches are completely bare. If you didn't know any better, you would say they were dead. From the ground to the upper-most branches, there is not a green leaf in sight. But we know that the trees are not dead. You may not be able to see the life in the tree, but it is there, and that's what is important. Without that life, the tree really would be only a piece of dead wood.

Our lives can be compared to the trees, as they go through the seasons. As time goes on, just as the trees lose their beauty and look dead, so too it happens with us.

Time marches on with us, the things we were once able to do become more difficult, events and people become memories, and as we approach the autumn of our lives, we realise that a large part of our life is over.

But behind the dead looking limbs and branches, there is still life, waiting to burst out in fresh, green life – as we have been seeing over the past few weeks! We know that the resurrected Jesus has won for us eternal life with Him in heaven. Time may be marching on for us now, and we can't do anything about that. As much as we would like it to stop so that we can accomplish all that we would like to in the years we have left, we have the assurance that our dying is not the end of us, but the beginning of a glorious new spring.

We heard Jesus say to the disciples *"Do not be worried and upset. Believe in God and believe also in Me. There are many rooms in My Father's house, and I am going to prepare a place for you"* (John 14:1,2). Jesus is reminding us that even though we will go through the autumn and winter of our lives, that doesn't mean the end. There awaits for all those who believe in Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life, a glorious spring where there is new life and new beginnings, and a new home where there will be no such things as aging, aches and pains, or dying.

Though the writer of Psalm 90 is well aware of how his years are passing away, and that nothing can recapture the years that have passed, nevertheless he is not pessimistic about life. He is not all doom and gloom when it comes to growing old. His confidence is in God. As he says at the very beginning of the psalm: *Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born, or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.*

Because God is eternal and gracious, because He will always be there, and will always be our loving God, life has an enduring and lasting quality about it. The years may be passing away, but beyond this life and in spite of the grave, there is life through Jesus our Saviour.

As we wait for the day when we are called from this life, to that glorious new spring, God promises, *"I am your God and will take care of you, until you are old and your hair is gray.*

I made you, and will care for you; I will give you help and rescue you" (Isaiah 46:4). He states that His love for us will never fail and He is always ready to help us deal with all that growing older brings. We may not know what the future will bring, but we do know that His promise stands, *"I made you, and I will take care of you, even when you are old and your hair is gray"*.

You see the Bible always looks at life in the context of God's relationship with us. This applies to every stage of life, including that time when we notice the changes that aging is bringing into our lives. Even if we do end up in a nursing home with our minds and bodies failing, God's promise still stands. We can still rely on Him to be our strength and help even, when we are the frailest, and even when our memory fails, or our speech falters. He still promises, *"I will give you help, and rescue you"*.

One of the problems of this world is that many people no longer see their lives in a relationship with God. They have broken away from God. All too often, life is seen as a once only cycle. We are born, we live, we grow old, and we die. And that's it. Once you have reached the autumn years of your life, and approaching the lifeless winter, that's all that can be expected from life. There are many people, who face the passing years with a kind of hopelessness, a sense of purposelessness and aimlessness, or fear, even terror.

But when we view our life from God's perspective, we get a whole new outlook. Jesus wants nothing but happiness for us, and has gone to extreme lengths to make sure that we are happy now, and forever in eternity. He assures us that He is with us always, to the end of the age, and that when the time comes for us to leave this life, He wants us to be in the place where He is – that is in heaven. And as we move toward the end of our earthly life, He reminds us that He is our everlasting God who provides us with help and comfort, as we face all the fears and worries that growing old brings.

He provides us with the reason for wanting to make the most of the time we have in this life, enjoying life, and serving and helping others, in the way that only those who have experienced the passing of the years can.

Throughout life, whether we are talking about getting our first job, or taking up new studies, or an apprenticeship as a young worker; undertaking the responsibilities of being parents, and the anxieties this brings as you watch your children grow from babies to young adults; or realizing your own lapses of memory, failing strength, the wrinkles that worry you, your concern over your middle age spread, all signs that we are getting older, that we are passing from one season to the next.

One day baldness, bifocals, bunions, and bulge will become characteristic of people in our age group. When that day comes, let's greet it with a song of praise on our lips rather than moans and groans. We have a God who is faithful to His promises, and will take care of us and help us, even when our hair is gray.

We thank God that He sees wrinkles, and unsteady steps, as something beautiful.

We praise God that the winter of our life will give way to the glorious new spring of eternity.

Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
as we wait expectantly for His coming. Amen.