

## "ANNA IN THE TEMPLE: A LIFE WELL LIVED."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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**Text for Sermon: Luke 2:36-38; see also I Timothy 5:3-8**

### Introduction:

#### *Anna in the Temple.*

I want to return to this morning's text and focus more intently on Anna. Scripture tells us very little about her but what it does say is very important and instructive. She is a model for us.

By first century standards she was very old and by first century standards hers has a very long and difficult life. To be a widow that long in those times is hard to imagine. There was no retirement or social security. She must have been poor and known little else but hardship.

People who are destitute and desperate do something others too often forget to do, they turn to God, they have no other hope but to set their hope on the God of hope. I am reminded of the example of Paul.

**II Corinthians 1:8** For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. **9** Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

Anna exemplifies in the physical realm what we all are in the spiritual realm. In this life, on this side of heaven we are poor and destitute, without help or hope apart from Christ.

There are *four things* about Anna that stand out in this text, four things the Holy Spirit wants us to know and to imitate about her character.

#### *Anna loved God and she loved God's house.*

The temple was the place of God, where God dwelt. God was her refuge and her strength, her very present help in time of trouble (Psalm 46:1).

Anna is a most beautiful picture of an elderly person still abounding in acts of devotion to God, who still loves God and loves His house and His people. It's a joy and blessing to see those who in old age have not grown weary in well-doing and do not think they are past these things or no longer needing them. Rather as the day of their departing to

heaven draws near they are more and more attentive to eternal things, to heavenly things, to holy and godly things.

In the temple she felt closer to God. She loved to be among the things of God, the Ark of the Covenant, the altar, the holy of holies, the Torah, the priests. The words of the Psalmist no doubt echoed in her own heart:

**Psalm 84:1** How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!

**2** My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord;  
my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.

**3** Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself,  
where she may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.

**4** Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise!

**Psalm 27:4** One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after:  
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,  
to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

Her life had a center, a focus, a purpose, meaning. She was thoroughly God-centered.

People who are God-centered see things, they see things in the heavenlies, they discern spiritual realities, they are blessed with visions of glorious things. They see more than other people see. They see things in God's Word, they hear things in sermons, they get more out of the Word and prayer.

Anna is both an example and an encouragement to us, to the elderly and to us all. She represents the fruit of a God-centered life, a life well-lived.

***Anna was a woman of great self-denial.***

She worshipped and served God with fasting day and night. She crucified her flesh for the sake of her soul. She died to self that she might live to God. Was her denial loss? Not in her mind, it was all gain. "What does it profit a man to gain the world, but lose his soul?"

In the words of missionary Jim Elliott, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

She was not carried away by the pride of life and the lusts of the flesh. She was not caught up in temporary things, in trivial and worldly things. She did not waste away the precious gift of time with hours upon hours of mindless TV or worldly novels or gossip or pining about the past.

She didn't just observe the two days of fasting and or the three hours of prayer, she went above and beyond. She was constantly at prayer and fasting and at every opportunity of worship and service in the temple. Her faith was not formal, not cut and dried, not compartmentalized. Her devotion was not limited to an hour or two on Sunday or a prayer before meals.

The Pharisees fasted and prayed several times a week. But they are not praised in Scripture. They did it for themselves, to be noticed and approved of by men. They were loves of money and power and position.

To live for yourself, for selfish interests and pleasures is to be dead toward God and to be dead toward God is to be truly dead. To be spiritually dead is the very worst kind of dead.

Anna is praised because it was different with her. She was disenchanted with the things of this world and enchanted with the things of God. Older people learn that and they can teach the rest of us that. Anna loved God and loved His house and it was nothing to her to deny herself in the service of her God.

She denied herself present things for future things, good things for glorious things. Again what a picture of the difference between those who live for this life and for the pleasures of this life and those who live for eternity and store up their treasures in heaven.

She teaches us to prefer the things of God and for many of us that will require a change in our preferences. Blessed is the man who hungers and thirsts for righteousness. Seek first the kingdom of God and all the good and necessary things will be added unto you.

***She was a woman of great prayer.***

She prayed day and night. Like the old man Simeon in the temple also, she was praying and waiting for the consolation of Israel and the redemption of Jerusalem.

She did not grow weary in well doing, in pleading and waiting. Isn't that the definition of prayer, asking God and waiting on God?

But it's not just a passive waiting, more of a persistent waiting on the Lord. Prayer is setting your heart on Christ and on the things of Christ and earnestly seeking Him and those things with all your heart.

Notice how Anna especially persisted in prayer night and day. Do you think God appreciates being hounded in prayer? Will it surprise you if I answered yes? First of all

it's God's will that we ask Him for things. And not only is it His will, it's His delight. He loves it when we ask for things.

Proverbs 15:8 says, "The prayer of the upright is His delight." In fact, He takes special steps to see to it He is persistently sought out. Isaiah 62:6-7, "On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; all day and all night they will never keep silent. You who remind the Lord, take no rest for yourselves; and give Him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

God goes so far as to appoint people to "give him no rest" but to "remind the Lord" and "never [to] keep silent." Anna is one of God's appointed persistent prayers who love to pray and from whom He loves to hear. Do you know you worship a God who loves to be asked for things and delights in your prayers like incense (Revelation 5:8)?

Here is a widow who had very little to give by the world's standards but it was a lot to God and He was pleased. By the world's standards prayer is a small thing, an inconsequential thing, but by God's standards it is a most powerful thing. It connects us to the Holy Spirit. "Not by might, not by power, but by the Spirit of God" (Zechariah 4:6).

***Anna was a woman who received a great reward.***

She saw the answer to the greatest prayer she prayed. She saw the consolation of Israel and the redemption of Jerusalem with her own eyes. She prayed for great things and saw great things.

The countless thousands of saints through the centuries who had gone before her only saw with the eyes of faith.

But for Anna it was different. God blessed her by allowing her to see what she had for so many years prayed for. Her faith was turned to sight, her hope to certainty. How great must have been her joy.

She got to see the very one who would open for her and for all believers the way into the one place she could not go, the Holy of Holies, to come before the very presence of the living God.

What could possibly be our reward? After all Christ has come. But there remains a second advent, the second coming of Christ is still a promise to be fulfilled.

How much might it change our present outlook and our present attitude and our present lifestyle if our fervent prayer was for the final coming of Christ? How dramatically would that change what's important to us, what we are working and striving for?

What would be different about our lives, our behavior, our conduct and habits if we were looking for and longing for the final redemption and consolation of all the earth? Who today longs for and loves the day of the Lord's returning?

**II Timothy 4:8** There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to *all who have loved his appearing*.

**Hebrews 9:28** Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save *those who are eagerly waiting for him*.

Christ is the reward of all who long for Him. He is the reward of all who long for victory over sin, over any bondage, any addiction, any temptation. Christ is the reward of all who long for liberation, freedom, peace, forgiveness and pardon, healing and hope.

Are you longing for something this world can never provide or supply? Look to Jesus. Open your eyes, the eyes of your heart, and fix your eyes on Jesus.

And if this exhortation bounces off of your heart without the slightest sense of desire or longing, then pray God changes your heart before you can't hear His voice and can't response to His grace and won't repent of your old ways, and lose all reward in the life to come.

### **A call to prayer.**

This is call us to be a people of more prayer, especially to those here who feel less useful and less necessary in the eyes of the world. You are most useful to God and most necessary to us and our future.

God in His wisdom and grace has been pleased to give many in our midst a long life. You represent a treasure in our body, a source of great spiritual power, of kingdom moving power.

You have been given the gift of time, ability and freedom to approach the throne of heaven on all of our behalf and entreat the heavenly Father for His fatherly favor and blessing upon this body.

Instead of feeling useless, instead of thinking of yourself as being a burden and a hindrance, you are the ones who can lead us in prayer, and show us the power of prayer, and can do the mightiest works. You are the ones who can unleash the power of God in our midst.

This is not to suggest that our widows don't pray, or don't know how to pray. This is not to diminish prayer by the rest of us, but to unleash even greater prayer power. This is to acknowledge the gift of God among us and to fan into flames what is already here. This is to pour gas on a fire until we are all set ablaze for the glory of God.

At a time in life when some feel pushed aside or are tempted to take back seat or get out of the way so as not to be a burden, they are actually being equipped and blessed and prepared by God to be able to expend their remaining energies on the most important work needed to be done.

You have served on council and on committees, you have taught Sunday School, GLOW and cadets, you have volunteered and served, and now you have graduated to the greatest work, the most needful task, praying for the great and many needs all around us.

Let's lay a hold of the horns of the altar, let's wrestle with the great angel in prayer until God releases His blessing, let's day and night stand in the gap and persist in prayer before the throne of God. Let's go to Christ our great intercessor and make great intercession.

May the lives of the widows and widowers and elderly in this place be as beautiful a gift to our temple as Anna and Simeon were to the temple of old. And may we behold Jesus in our midst because of you and your prayers.

**Prayer:** Holy Father, would you be pleased to use the wisdom of the widows and the spiritual energies of the elderly to lead us to new heights, to new visions, to new understandings, to new worship and service. Lord, may our senior saints be encouraged that theirs is the greatest work and theirs is the greatest reward, and may we honor them and follow them as they show us Jesus in their words and example. Father, glorify your Son and glorify His Church through your answers to the prayers of your people. And yes, come Lord Jesus, come quickly. We wait for you. Amen.