

Finding Fulfillment in Jesus

Isaiah 61:10-62:3
Luke 2:22-40

December 31, 2017
Faith Community

Two people that you don't hear much about in the Christmas story are old Simeon and Anna. They come into play when Mary and Joseph travel to Jerusalem to present the baby Jesus to the Lord at the temple, and to offer a sacrifice.

Luke tells us Simeon was "righteous and devout," and the "Holy Spirit rested on him." He'd been granted a special sense of perception or discernment that led him to anticipate the Messiah's arrival during his lifetime. So connected with God was he that he was also in tune with his own body. As he held the child he acknowledged that his earthly life had reached its completion, and experienced great joy and peace because of it.

Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people...(Luke 2:29-31)

Anna, for her part, was a prophet who spent her life at the temple, staying connected with God through fasting and prayer. Luke tells us,

At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:38)

Friends, I want to be that wise. I want to be so in tune with God that I'll see him at work in the world and in my own life, and praise God every step of the way, and point it out to others.

In order for this to happen I need to grow. I need to be a disciple. And remember,

Discipleship is always:

- Personal - becoming more like Christ myself.
- Missional - helping others do the same.

Glenn McDonald is pastor of the Zionsville Presbyterian Church in suburban Indianapolis. He's the author of a book entitled, The Disciple Making Church.

In his book Glenn tells of a cruise he and his wife took to help celebrate his in-laws' fiftieth wedding anniversary.

At the end of the first day, he and the other passengers were fast asleep when they were awakened by the cabin intercom.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain. I'm very sorry to disturb you, but we have an urgent concern. We have an unconfirmed report that a passenger has fallen overboard. We have already turned the ship around and initiated a search. Please go to your room if you're not already there, and account for everyone in your party. If anyone is missing, please report their name to purser's deck immediately.'

"Thirty minutes passed. Through our window we could see searchlights sweeping across the black water as the U. S. and Dutch Coast Guards arrived on the scene.

"There were 1,700 guests on board along with 700 crew members. From the list of 2,400 people they were able to discern the name of the missing person....the energies of everyone on board were now focused on the hunt for that single passenger. Though he was a stranger to us, we all knew his name.

"Two hours later the passenger had been found, rescued, and flown to a hospital where he made a complete recovery.

"It turns out that the person in question was a 20-year-old man who at 4:30 in the morning got into a restricted area and had fallen off the bow while doing 'the Titanic thing - I'm king of the world!'"

Glenn McDonald writes that this had a dramatic effect on the rest of the cruise. "Every passenger now knew, 'I'm sailing with someone who would turn this ship around in the middle of the night and come looking for me, even if I'm doing the wrong thing in the wrong place at the wrong time.'"

"It occurred to me later that this is precisely what Jesus did on the cross. He pulled out all the stops to launch a search-and-rescue for an entire world of lost people, a great many of whom remain oblivious to his very existence."¹

¹ Glenn McDonald, [The Disciple Making Church: From Dry Bones to Spiritual Reality](#) (Grand Haven, MI, FaithWalk Publishing, 2007), 21-23.

Friends, as disciples that's the first thing you need to know. The Christmas story tells us that Almighty God turned everything on its head to show you how precious you are. Simeon told us that when he took the baby in his arms that day in the temple.

There was also Anna, who offers us another perspective on the arrival of this newborn king.

Have you ever left your gas cap at a gas station after filling up? Or how about leaving your bankcard in an ATM machine after making a withdrawal? Most cars come equipped with an attached gas cap so you can't forget, and most ATM machines make a bit of racket when the card is ejected, but forgetting anyway is something psychologists call a post completion error. It's the tendency, after completing a task, to forget the steps that got you there.

Mark Batterson says, "I think the post completion error is one of the dangers we face this time of year. I know lots of people who have been Christians for twenty-five years. But they don't have twenty-five years of experience. They have one year of experience repeated twenty-five times. Why? Because they're not growing. Instead, they live lives of good intentions, and nothing really changes.

"What lessons has God taught you this past year, and how are you using them to reach out beyond yourself?

"I think a huge part of discipleship is overcoming this post completion error. If you're in recovery from an addiction, don't forget the steps you took. If your marriage has been reconciled, don't forget the steps. Share them with others. That's called discipleship.²

This is the lesson of Anna: day in, day out faithfulness in little things along with the big stuff, and finding oneself thrilled and fulfilled in the process.

Friends, as a new year is upon us, I want you to consider the discipline of journal keeping. It doesn't have to be anything fancy or literary. Instead, let it be a place where you can keep track of lessons learned, insights, and things that get your attention. Then, as you look back, you can see how you've grown. You can track God's faithfulness in your life.

² Mark Batterson, <http://www.evotional.com/>
accessed December 23, 2008.

Hopefully you have one.

Bring it on Sundays. Take it with you when you travel. Keep it close at all times, because you never know when an insight or question or challenge or opportunity will come your way, and you won't want to miss it.

God turned the ship around for you because you are that precious in his eyes. In turn, he wants you to communicate that to people who desperately need good news in their lives.

I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness.... (Isaiah 61:10, TNIV)

That's the story of Simeon.

The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory.... You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand.... (Isaiah 62:2-3, TNIV)

That's the call of Anna.

How do you respond?