

Soul Sisters 6 - Anna



Simeon and Anna, by Otto Stemler
Bible Pictures, Carolsfield publishers

Luke 2:27-32,36-38

²⁷Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹ 'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;

³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ 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.

Anna, is the only woman called a prophet in New Testament writings, for her ability to “think forward”, and to speak meaningfully when people were looking for spiritual direction. Her backstory is interesting: we are told the name of her father, but not her husband. We are told she never left the temple, but we don’t know why. We know that widows were often victimized by relatives, but perhaps the temple was a refuge as well as a place for prayer 24/7. People connected with Anna there, they were drawn to her strength and faith though she herself lived in a situation of extreme vulnerability. If only the author of the gospel had paid as much attention to Anna’s words, as to Simeon’s! Simeon was a devout man, and his prayer is beautiful – but it is for his own private faith. Anna’s words went out into the world, specifically good news of the child Jesus. Anna had always known that God longed for all people to be released from their bondage, and when Jesus was brought to the temple, Anna was able to see something in the future and say “Me too.”

What can we learn from our Soul Sister Anna? Perhaps to keep our eyes open for new life and possibility, even within the traditions and institutions that might seem stale or stubborn.

Question for Reflection: In this story, the temple represents a place of faith, welcome and refuge, not the institution that sends Jesus to his crucifixion. How do we, as a church, stay faithful to our purpose and not exclude those who would bring us new life?

Prayer: *O God of every place, both holy and ordinary, both justice-seeking and quietly listening, be with us in our ministry today. Make us all prophets, insightful and courageous, we pray. Amen*