



And then, there's Anna: just making it into the final paragraph, almost a footnote in the grand scheme of the story. And yet, Jesus must be presented to her, too. The peace, love, joy, grace, and new life in this most precious Christ child: it all must be shared with the one who seemingly spent all her free time at the place meant to be a sanctuary for our entire human condition, a sanctuary for the world to experience God's tender embrace brought to life in the youngest of life. This Presentation of Our Lord Sunday does not always get celebrated in our usual church proceedings from year to year, but when it does, it should bless us with the needed opportunity to not only give thanks for the easily overlooked Anna from long ago, but to cherish the Annas among us now, who venture into sanctuaries not only because they believe they were presented with the very

heart of God in Jesus Christ there, but because they insist on ensuring that as many people as possible can experience peace, love, joy, grace, and new life there, too.

So, I want tell you about "Paula," whose full-time occupation was a pre-surgery nurse: the one who was absolutely necessary for the patients who would arrive at some ungodly early morning hour for a procedure that would never start on time anyway. For the patients whose blood-pressure was already sky-rocketing before starting to consider how many days they would stay in rehab and worrying about the anxiety felt by their family, not to mention needing to tell their name and date of birth and why they were there and picking between 0-10 on the pain scale hundreds of times before they were finally taken back; in the meantime "Paula" would tell them a couple of jokes and get them whatever they needed and even offered a prayer if they were of the spiritual sorts and had them feel as if they were part of her own family within an hour's time. That she must have thought that she had to present Jesus in all his compassion to complete strangers while wearing her scrubs.

But in her more casual attire, she was the youth group leader at the church just down the road from her house. So, about one Saturday a month, after spending the whole week of trying to calm down seemingly insurmountable blood pressures, she would stay up all hours of the night with a bunch of teenagers, running up and down stairs playing games with them, leading Bible studies, praying, including through the years that were not exactly the...prime of her life. Regardless, she believed Jesus was presented into her life from the very beginning, and she couldn't stop until every youth who came into her life was convinced of that Gospel for them, too.

Of course, as is often the case with the modern day Annas, it didn't stop with one ministry role: instead, she spent her fair share of time reading the lessons on Sunday morning, helping with the coffee hour, maintained the flowers out front, spent her evenings at the most edge of your seat enthralling council meetings, and even with the finance crew for even more fun. But she would never boast about it. Some would try to push her further up in any collection of paragraphs telling the story of the congregation, but she preferred stay in the final one, almost a footnote in the grand scheme of all the ministry done for members and complete strangers, too. For some holy reason, she would rather promote the amazingness of a supposedly almighty God who insisted on showing up in the giggles and laughter and the sweetest serenity of a child.

But also, as with most modern day Annas, it isn't so easy to pull it all off as they like to make the rest think. "Paula" was a mother of four, including a daughter who made some rather...interesting life choices, let's say; a son who endured a four-wheeler accident that affected his cognitive abilities for the rest of his young life that ended far too soon, not to mention the other son who served in the Marines in Afghanistan and must have made her worried thoroughly sick, and perhaps raised her own blood pressure at times to rival that of her patients during the week. I have absolutely no idea how she pulled it off, but evidently, she couldn't help herself. "Paula" believed Jesus was presented to her from the very beginning of her life, with all the peace, love, joy, grace, and new life, that only a child could so serenely, and yet, so powerfully pull off in showing Simeon and Anna and the rest of the world.

And although this Presentation of Our Lord story isn't the most well-known of our usual Sunday morning readings, I hope it presents us an opportunity to not only give thanks for the last paragraph Anna, and the modern day footnote Annas, but also recognizing that it isn't always easy for them to pull it off. For the Annas to spend whatever free time they have not just in sanctuaries, but youth group and Sunday school rooms, and around tables for the most captivating evening meetings, while also maintaining care for their own children in home living rooms and complete strangers at hospital bedsides. Sometimes we in the church need to say out loud that we recognize how difficult it can be to maximize the whatever spare time with service, and attempting to do it all with Christ-like compassion. But over and over again, the Annas, while maintaining nothing more than their footnote status, will always insist that they have more than enough calming peace, more than enough captivating love, more than enough contagious joy, more than enough unbelievable grace, more than enough new life to pull it off. And not because of their own character or wisdom, but because the sweetest serenity of a Christ child was presented not just in a temple long ago, but in the very depths of their heart, and in all of us. The most precious gift of God that will never ever be taken away. For that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!