

*22When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23(as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), 24and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."*

*25Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. 26It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 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; 30for my eyes have seen your salvation, 31which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." 33And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. 34Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed 35so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too." 36There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanael, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. 38At 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. 39When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. 40The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.*

How many of you know what I studied in college? Have you often wondered what grade I earned in history, or world literature? Surely you have been concerned that I learned my calculus well, and my Greek.

What? You have never even thought about these things?

Four years of my life I invested and all you care about is that I have a piece of paper that says I was graduated. And after that three more years of study at a seminary, and a year of internship, and not a single person has ever asked to see my report card. Nor even my diploma. That I have one is enough.

Degrees, diplomas, credentials. That is why I am standing here and you are sitting there. Only those with degrees and diplomas and credentials get to be preachers, called to speak for God. How surprising it should be so in a church that remembers Simeon and Anna.

For Simeon had no credentials, no calling except through the Holy Spirit. Simeon had no fancy letters after his name that would cause people to listen to him. He was an old man

whose training was trusting in God. The university he attended was life. His studies were to remember what God had promised, what God had done, to watch and wait for what God was doing.

I'm sure that the priests and the Levites and the ones with the fine robes hardly took notice of Simeon. They were the important ones, he but a listener. But when the Lord wanted an announcement made, God chose Simeon.

For a baby had been brought to the temple that day. To the priest who handled the required sacrifice of two young pigeons this baby and his mother were just like any other. But guided by the Holy Spirit Simeon came into the temple and took the baby Jesus in his arms and praised God saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

Simeon had been waiting; for God had assured Simeon that he would see the Lord's Messiah before he died. Now God had kept his word. Simeon was holding Jesus. "I'll die in peace now Lord because I have seen the salvation of all people. I have held the light that God has sent to end every darkness in the world, Jesus."

That day in the temple there was also a prophet, Anna, 84 years old. Every day she was in the temple, fasting and praying. She was a widow which in that culture at that time meant that she was poor. At that moment she came and began to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

She heard the word of God spoken through Simeon, she became a messenger of God also, passing on what she had heard.

Two old people without a single credential between them, chosen by God to tell of Jesus.

A young girl named Mary, shepherds, Simeon, Anna, one by one God was choosing people the world would not notice except for Jesus. Caesar Augustus who ruled over each of them had no idea they even existed - nor did Herod, nor the priests. These were all caught up in their own lives, their own importance, never suspecting that nearly two thousand years later they would be remembered as part of his story - Jesus' story.

Most of all they had no idea that their eternal future depended on a baby born in Bethlehem, brought to the temple by Mary and Joseph, announced by Simeon and Anna.

What is important in your life? Credentials, getting ahead, the right job, good pay? As important as all of these things are to us, they will all melt away like the snow that now covers the ground. Jesus Christ for whom Simeon waited and whom Anna announced is the one upon whom your life depends. He is the light that God has sent to lead you and guide you whether you are rich or poor, successful or in the world's eyes a failure.

One thing about credentials and success and honors we receive: often they are a trap for us. I stand and preach God's word. You say, "Good sermon pastor." My heart swells up with pride. Soon I'm thinking about me and no longer about Christ.

Maybe that is why God continually turned to the folks with no credentials, an old man and an old woman, and shepherds and fishermen and women who just followed along. There was room in their hearts for Jesus. Since they were not continually thinking about themselves they could think about him.

I remember the day when I was ordained, how my whole church came to honor me. So many kind words were spoken. I felt very special. I thought: I must really have a lot to offer the church.

Twelve years later after serving two churches in North Dakota I was back at my home congregation to worship on a Sunday morning. Irma whose husband baptized me and confirmed me said how she wished her husband had lived to see me as a pastor. It made me proud to hear her words.

And then she said something that made me very humble.

I pray for you every day.

She was Anna, Simeon, Mary - trusting in God, praying for God's word and will to be done.

Here in this place Anna and Simeon and Mary are. They are the ones who believe and pray and praise God.

No credentials are needed for this club - only faith in Jesus.