

Anna's Song  
5 of 5 in Songs of Christmas Series  
Speaker: Kevin White  
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Luke 2:36-38

My neighbour Jacky is crazy. Let me tell you why. He gets out of his house, and then runs 42 kilometers - for fun! Nobody's chasing him. He's not in danger. He just - runs.

To put that in perspective - I live in Markham - for those of you who are local. He ran from Markham, Ontario, to downtown Toronto. Then he ran around downtown for a bit!

I ran four kilometres around our neighbourhood and I think I'm special. I can't imagine how difficult it was. Jacky was saying that part of what gave him strength was that there were people all along the route cheering him on, telling him he could do it, not to quit. They also gave him stuff to help him with his journey - water, etc.

It also helped that he trained all the way leading up to it. It's not like he just got up one day and decided to do it. He had the finish line in mind but he also got help along the way.

What's something that's hard that you think you could never do? If you're watching live online right now, type it in the chat.

Maybe it's run a marathon. Maybe it's passing math. Maybe it's making crème brulee?

Unfortunately, we're all going to face situations that seem so hard, we are not sure we are going to make it through. Life is filled with hard times. Right now, we are in the middle of a pandemic and for many of us, another lock down. MANY people are really struggling.

We're all wondering - how are we going to make it through? How are we going to make it through the moments, the days, the weeks, the months that are ahead of us?

Many people are tempted to give up. To give up on school, on work, on relationships on themselves.

The question is - can we make it through? And if so, how?

We're finishing up a series called, "Songs of Advent." Over the last few weeks, we've looked at the book of Luke and the songs of Mary, Zechariah, Simeon, the angels and today we are going to look at Anna's song - except that it's not a song. It's actually three verses.

In fact, Anna is only mentioned in three verses in the Entire Bible. And yet, I believe that her story gives us an incredible example to follow.

So, shall we go for it?

The passage is Luke 2:36-38. It takes place in the Temple, when Jesus was presented by his mom and dad for a Jewish purification ceremony. Simeon – an old man, has just taken Jesus in his arms and blessed him. This takes us to today's passage:

Luke 2:36-38 – There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Some background to this passage. Anna was a prophetess, a female prophet, which is really cool because at this time in history, women weren't really given any position in power in that society. It's cool that in God's house, it's different.

Then there's a random detail about her being the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher – or is it? We'll come back to it later to see.

The tribe of Asher is one of the twelve tribes of Israel. Who cares? Not you? Okay, we'll move on.

It then says she was very old – not just old - VERY old. That's an important detail. She was married. She was married for seven years. Then her husband died. Then my NIV says she was a widow until she was eighty-four. Some other translations actually have it saying that she was a widow for 84 years. So, if she was married at 14 (which was normal back then), married for 7 years... quick maths... 21 when she became a widow and then a widow for 84 years – that would make her 105 years old at this scene. So not impossible, but you see why many translations opt for 84. Either way, she is very old and has been a widow for a super long time. Got it?

Okay.

Then it says she never left the temple. That could mean that she had a room that was attached to the outside of the temple – as many prophets and priests did in those days. Whatever the case, She's showing up to church every day. Every day for all those days, weeks, months, years and decades. It says she worshipped night and day, by fasting and prayer.

Let's stop right there for now because that's already a lot.

I want us to put ourselves in Anna's shoes. Not that Anna – that's Anna our Office Manager. Hi Anna!

I mean Anna from the story – stay focused party people!

Let's put ourselves in Anna's shoes.

Let's go way back to when she was first married. I'm sure she had hopes, dreams, plans.

Somewhere along the line, those dreams were shattered. Seven years into her marriage, her husband dies.

It doesn't say in the text whether or not she had children, but it would seem as if perhaps she didn't.

Whatever the case, she was standing at a fork in the road. What would she do with the rest of her life?

What would she do with her hope?

She decides to be at the temple every day and worship.

What does worship mean?

It really means to give worth to something. When I think something is worthy of my worship, I put it first, I make it a priority. If you want to know what you worship, look at where you spend your time, your money, and your thoughts.

For Anna, she worshipped God. She gave him worth. She put him first.

Every morning, she gets up, gets ready and then goes to the temple and worships.

Every night, she goes back to the temple and she worships.

Every day, every night, for days, then weeks, then months, then years and then decades.

Every day, she worships God.

Every day, she puts God first.

Now I can imagine that in her life, she had many hard moments. There must have been days when she didn't feel like going, didn't feel like worshipping God. She didn't feel like putting God first.

There must have been many days where she must have been tired. Where she must have been sad - depressed even. What about every year on the anniversary of her husband's death? That must have been a hard day. What did she do? She worshipped. What about when she saw

other people happily married or moving on with their lives, their families. What did she do? She worshipped.

Every day, for all those days, weeks, months, years and decades. No matter what. Anna worshipped.

And then... one day... while she was worshipping, as she always did... she suddenly sees Jesus. The Bible says, "coming up to them at that very moment..." that very moment – the Greek for that translates the opportune time... as in one that could have been easily missed.

But because she was there all the time she was there at the right time.

I don't think you heard me church. I said, because she was there all the time, she was there at the right time.

Are you making enough space for God so that when he shows up, you're there?

Because Anna was there at the right time, she got to meet Jesus. She got to see the face of God.

At the same time, it wasn't the first time she had met God. It was God who had given her strength to make through those tough moments, those hard days, weeks, months, years and all those decades.

One of the things I was reading said that hope isn't something we achieve, it's something we receive.

By allowing ourselves to hope we open ourselves to receive something that we can't achieve on our own.

Anna somehow opened herself up to that hope.

Many of us try to take hope out of our lives. Because hope is risky. What if I hope and then I'm disappointed? Won't that be more painful than if I never opened myself up to hope at all? And yet, the real issue isn't with hope itself, it's with what we put our hope in (from Axis).

"Hope is one of the bravest things a person can have. Hope in God dares to believe and trust that things will work out – that God will come through." (Axis)

Anna had that hope.

Hope is something we receive, but it's also something we learn to do.

When you look at her story, she shouldn't be standing. After all those years, all that pain. And yet there she was, still showing up.

That's what Anna did

Day after day,  
Week after week  
Month after month  
Year after year  
Decade after decade

Was it hard for her to lose her husband? Absolutely. I bet you she wouldn't wish that pain on anybody. And yet, it seemed to be in that pain that she experienced God in a way that gave her the hope and strength that she needed to make it through.

She didn't let her circumstances rob her life of joy and purpose.  
She allowed God to fill the void of her loss. She could have waved a white flag after losing her husband – she could have seen herself as a helpless victim.  
Anger at God could have made her bitter.  
And yet every day she got up, got dressed, got out and joined God's people in worship (from Celebrate Recovery Bible)

**When we worship Jesus, we get strength for today and hope for tomorrow (main point).**

You remember at the beginning of the message when we said there was a random detail about her being the daughter of Penuel from the tribe of Asher?

It turns out the name Penuel means "face of God"

Anna ends up seeing the face of God. She ends up seeing Jesus.

Anna's hope was ultimately fulfilled when she saw the face of Jesus. The face of God.

I remember one time when I was a kid there was a thunderstorm.  
To me, the thunder was so loud. The lightening was so bright. Louder than I ever heard before. I don't think I've heard thunder that loud since.  
It was so loud, I was scared that the world was going to end. It was so loud, that I just couldn't sleep. I was so scared. I was so alone. I really tried to be brave. Eventually I couldn't take it anymore. I went to bedroom next door and woke my older brother Franklin up.  
Just seeing his face made me feel safe. I felt like if he was with me, I'd be okay. I actually felt comforted. I felt like I had the strength to make it. And I did make it.

Seeing the face of baby Jesus must have been so incredible for Anna that day.

But long before that, she had already seen the face of God in the storms of her life.

And that gave her the strength to run the race with Jesus at the finish line.

That hope gave her actual strength every day. Every day as she went to worship God, she got strength. Strength for that moment. And then she worshipped God again. And she got strength for that moment. And then she worshipped God again. And she got strength for that moment. And then she worshipped God again. And again. And again. And next thing you know, moments turned into days, days turned into weeks, weeks turned into months, months turned into years. And the next thing you knew – she had run a marathon.

If you were to ask very old Anna, just after meeting baby Jesus how she had the stamina to make it all that time despite the pain of her situation, she probably would have said, “one step at a time.”

One moment at a time. Worshipping God every moment. Every step of the way.

For many of us, we are standing at that fork in the road. This COVID has been a real tough one for many people. Myself included.

As I was preparing this message, I felt like God was speaking to me personally. Many of you will know that I’m going through a really tough season of my own.

I’ve had a lot of feelings, and questions. I’ve had to struggle with hope.

Some days I could barely put one foot in front of the other. And yet here I am. Showing up. Moment by moment. Worshipping Jesus.

I imagine many of you are going through a tough season. If you’re going through something right now, type Y for yes in the chat.

Many of you are really struggling with school.

Many of you are really struggling with being alone. Missing your friends. Missing your family.

Many of you are dealing with loss. The loss of a job. The loss of a relationship. The loss of a loved one.

There is so much grief nowadays. For many, it’s suffocating.

And yet. There is hope.

This whole season we just celebrated is based on hope.

In advent, we celebrate the coming of Jesus. Immanuel – God with us.

God entered into this world, he also entered into our pain.

Jesus knows what it’s like to suffer. To be alone. To be misunderstood. To be rejected. He was never married. Never had kids. Betrayed by his friends.

We are not alone in our suffering.

But that's not how the story ends. Not for Jesus. Not for us.

Advent also points to his second coming. When we will see Jesus face to face.

Listen to Revelation 21:3-4

... Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

Our hope for that day, gives us strength for this day.

**Worshipping Jesus gives us strength for today and hope for tomorrow.**

We worship Jesus because our hope for tomorrow gives us strength for today.

The songs in this series have all showed us examples of people whose hope for tomorrow gave them the strength they needed for the day.

Mary's hope for who Jesus would be gave her strength to endure the suffering and misunderstanding of being pregnant before marriage and before she was with a man.

Zechariah's and Simeon's hope for Jesus gave them the strength to wait decades for their promises to be fulfilled – Zechariah to have a child and Simeon to see Jesus before he died.

Simeon talks about how Jesus' life will be hard but that he will be victorious.

We too will have a hard life but ultimately, we will be victorious. Type amen in the chat if you agree.

That victory is what Anna held on to. Physically in Jesus but spiritually all those years before she even saw his face.

Anna's hope in Jesus gave her the strength to keep worshipping despite her circumstances.

As we wind down 2020 and look forward to 2021, normally we make new year's resolutions. If you're like me, your resolution is something like this... make it.

My application is simple and yet hard.

Keep on keeping on.

Anna worshipped the Saviour.

Are you in need of the Saviour this season?

Follow Anna's example.

Don't let pain drive us into isolation and depression.

Have continuous contact with God.

Keep on worshipping Jesus despite your circumstances.

What does that look like?

I like how the youth curriculum (GROW) put it.

Worship is what happens when we give honour to Jesus with our words and actions

1. Words
  - a. Sing praise to him
  - b. Tell him thank you
  - c. Tell him how incredible he is
  - d. Tell others about him
2. Actions
  - a. Let go of things that keep us far from him
  - b. Make space for him daily
  - c. Choose to obey him
  - d. Love and serve the people he loves (everyone)

Keep showing up for church. Get connected to a small group so you are in community. Take advantage of our online resources so that you can pray if you don't know and get a template to keep you focused every day.

Ask for prayer right now in the chat if you want to know more about Jesus, if you want to follow Jesus or if you are struggling with something right now and you need hope.

Keep on showing up. Worship Jesus in this moment. And ask for strength for next.

**Worshipping Jesus gives us strength for today and hope for tomorrow.**

Benediction

Numbers 6:24-26

The Lord bless you and keep you;

The Lord make his FACE shine on you and be gracious to you;

The Lord turn his FACE toward you and give you peace.



