

Life with a teenage nephew that you don't see everyday is a lesson in the mind-bending weirdness of time. I feel like every time I see Felix lately, *something* is different, and this has been going on for about the last year or so. I will never forget rolling into their house for his birthday last year and having him turn the corner of the hall and go, "*Hi*," then promptly see my double take and go, "Yeah, this is my voice now." What?! Who is this *man* that has taken over my little guy's voice? The next time, he was fresh off of his first solo youth trip, and when asked how it was, he just smiled and was like, "Some things gotta stay with the youth group." Oooooook. Teenage sass, engaged. And then there was the jarring moment at Christmas where I looked at him and was like...it has finally happened...I had maintained my status as the last one taller than him other than his dad for as long as I could, and now, here is this hulk of a man with his deep voice, his long teenager hair, his bulky shoulders, and he is as tall as me. 13 and ready to take over the world, like an entirely different human.

And yet...he's still my lil guy that will text at random just to say hi. He still lets me snuggle him, sometimes begrudgingly, but most of the time, he allows it. He is still the kid that goes to bed and makes sure he tells you he loves you. Over Christmas, he was always the last one up with me and he would make sure to come into to say good night and tell me he loved me.

He adores his pets, is a beautifully sensitive soul, with a love for *Five Nights at Freddy's* and horror movies, and will always be my little guy who was bald as a cucumber until he was almost two. Because that's the thing with time, no matter how much passes, no matter how much people change outwardly, there are people we love that we will always recognize. It didn't matter that his voice was deeper, I knew that was Felix. It didn't matter he could now look directly in my eyes, I knew that was Felix. He could be seven feet tall and no matter what, no matter where we were, I would know that that is my boy, even when he is fifty years old.

There is something innately recognizable to us about those that we hold dearly in our hearts. We could hear their voices across a room and know that they are ours. We could hear the way they walk or see the way they're standing, and just know...those are my people. It's like a soul deep recognition, one that stretches across time, space, and any kind of change. There are people that we will always just recognize and there is a deep comfort in that, a comfort that I'm sure both Anna and Simeon felt that day in the Temple when Joseph and Mary walked in with a tiny baby in their arms, a baby neither of these two had ever seen before, but something in their souls *knew*...this is who we have been waiting for...

We take a small detour in the lectionary cycle today because it's one of those years where this little lesser festival known as The Presentation of Our Lord, falls on a Sunday. Now this means we miss the people of Nazareth wanting to throw Jesus off a cliff for daring to preach the gospel, but in the midst of a world gone completely topsy turvy there is a little bit of comfort in sinking back into a Christmas vibe, if only for this morning. So what is this festival? This day? This is one of those days that marks for us a demonstration of the fact that Jesus grew up in a deeply Orthodox Jewish household. The tradition within Judaism was that after forty days, a woman who had gone through childbirth was to come to the Temple to participate in a ritual washing that would render her clean and prepared to re-enter into the full worship life of the community. At the same time, if the child was a first born son, like Jesus, they were to bring the baby to the Temple to be dedicated to God.

There were sacrifices involved with the dedication and this also reveals to us something about Jesus' childhood, scant though we are on details. The tradition was for a year old lamb to be sacrificed at a dedication, however, Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph offered either two turtledoves or young pigeons, the backup option in case the family could not afford a lamb to sacrifice. An Orthodox Jewish boy growing up in a poor,

not well to do household. His was not going to be a childhood of luxury and comfort, but one with hard work and all chipping in to make sure that all were cared for. But all of this isn't even the most interesting thing that happens at the Temple.

When they get there they are greeted on two separate occasions by two separate people, both of whom are old, wizened, and apparently have been *waiting* for Jesus to appear. We have Simeon who was told by God that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah, and we have Anna who has been living in the temple praying and fasting and waiting to see this moment come. Both of them when they see Jesus, even though he is just a baby at this point, cannot help their reaction. Simeon gathers him up in his arms and bursts into song. Simeon recognizes in this little boy that salvation has come, the thing he has been waiting for has arrived, and it isn't just for him, but for the whole world. In the middle of the temple complex he declares that here is a light to reveal God to the Gentiles, a light that will go out to the entire world. And Anna's reaction is not that far off, she immediately began preaching and praising God for this child brought into the world. Even before he could speak, do anything more than wiggle around in his blankets, Simeon and Anna recognized in Jesus their Savior, the one come to bring deliverance for them and for all. You get the sense

that no matter what, no matter where they were, how old they were, what they were going through, when Jesus came in the room they were always going to recognize him for what he was...their Lord. And now they both can go in peace...because God's word has been fulfilled for them.

The reactions of these two begs the question...what do we do when we recognize Jesus? Or better yet, before we even get to our reaction, *do we* recognize Jesus? Did these two think that the one they were waiting for was going to end up being an infant? Probably not, but they didn't write it off as impossible or illogical, they let praise and prayer flow out because God works in weird and wondrous ways. They don't stand back and question, because clearly this couldn't be the Messiah, it's a *baby*? They don't wonder at the fact that he comes from a poor family. They don't ask questions of his parents who have their own questionable background story. They just see Jesus before them, regardless of all the circumstances going on around them. They recognize Jesus in what many would say was the impossible and the illogical. It's a reminder we all desperately need.

We all know the good talk to talk, right? That Jesus is everywhere. That Jesus is in everything. That Jesus came into the world in a messy and mysterious way and that's how God continues to operate. We say all of that, but when challenged to actually view the world through that lens, we throw

up our blinders, insisting that we know the way God works in the world and more often than not those ways fit into our nicely constructed, logical boxes that don't stretch our boundaries and don't make us see the world through any other viewpoint than our own. We want Jesus to make sense, we want Jesus to fit into our world view, and when he doesn't, rather than changing our perspective, we're more likely to say that that's just not what God is or where God would show up or how God works.

We have Simeon saying that Jesus has come as a light for revelation to the Gentiles, a people that no one ever thought were an *option* for God, but when we are nudged to see God operating through or with a group that we think should be outside God's light, we balk and scramble and try to explain away that that can't be God, but must be the world's undue influence. Surely God can't be working amongst the trans community. Surely God couldn't have been in the drag queens that gave us sparkle blessings at NYG this summer. Surely God can't work through people who have been incarcerated or dealt with addiction or came through an immigration service. Surely God has to come in a nice, neat package of people that look, sound, and think like us.

We have Anna who sees a little baby and begins to praise and pray and say this baby is going to bring redemption and hope. When we hear

people talking about God's wide, expansive, abundant, welcoming love we try to explain it away or put boundaries on it, because well, we surely know God's plans and intentions better than God. Notice Anna doesn't go on and on about Jesus plans, about what she thinks will be the right path for him, she simply trusts that this child is going to be the one to redeem them all. Yet, we *love* saying that we know God's plans, we know the right path God should be taking, the people God should be condemning or welcoming. Let's face it, when we meet Jesus in our everyday lives, we are more likely to poke and prod and see why that *can't* be Jesus as opposed to be awestruck because man, God shows up *everywhere* and through everyone.

Simeon and Anna would recognize Jesus anywhere, just like I would recognize Felix anywhere, just like any of us would recognize our loved ones anywhere, but why can't we recognize Jesus anywhere? Why are we not willing to see the world in a way that dares to see Jesus in the unexpected, the unplanned, and the places where we would rather not? Why are we so determined to put boundaries on God that keep God limited, as opposed to freeing our minds to acknowledging that wherever we are, whomever we are with, God is working there? We need our eyes opened, we need light revealed to us, to instantaneously look at the world and go oh there's Jesus, thank God...now, I may walk in peace...**AMEN!!!**