

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena

November 15, 2009

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Samuel 1:4-20

⁴On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; ⁵but to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb. ⁶Her rival used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. ⁷So it went on year by year; as often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. ⁸Her husband Elkanah said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?"

⁹After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the LORD. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. ¹⁰She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD, and wept bitterly. ¹¹She made this vow: "O LORD of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head."

¹²As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. ¹³Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk. ¹⁴So Eli said to her, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine." ¹⁵But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD. ¹⁶Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time." ¹⁷Then Eli answered, "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him." ¹⁸And she said, "Let your servant find favor in your sight." Then the woman went to her quarters, ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer.

¹⁹They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD; then they went back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. ²⁰In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the LORD."

Mark 13:1-8

¹As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" ²Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

³When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴"Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?" ⁵Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. ⁶Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. ⁷When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. ⁸For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birthpangs.

"The Heart and Soul of Faith"

Elkanah gave to Hannah double portions of the sacrifice for her to take to the House of the Lord. Elkanah could not understand why Hannah would get so upset. Every year she did this. It was part of the way she lived the faith. Yet, every year it was the same; she was all out of sorts as she went to the House of the Lord, the Tabernacle. Understand that Hannah was only one of Elkanah's wives—and she had given him no children.

Hannah would go to the House of the Lord, year after year after year, and her prayers were earnest prayers that she would bear a child—a son. And year after year she did not conceive. When we encounter her she makes her way again to the house of the Lord.

And there the High Priest Eli, who you will recall has his own family issues, as in his sons which are anything but priestly. Anyway, Eli sees Hannah there praying.

Hannah is there praying and we are told very specifically in Scripture that her lips were moving but she was praying silently and fervently. Eli notices her there praying and assumes that she is drunk – and he attempts to chase her away.

She has to point out to him that she is not drunk but is pouring out her soul to the Lord. She says it in that very way— “I am pouring out my soul before the Lord.”

Hearing it Eli bids her to “Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him.” It was not a special recognition. It was what the priest would say to any person offering up prayer and petition before him.

They came out into the Temple courtyard and one of the disciples called Jesus’ attention to the large stones there. In fact, those very stones still stand there on the Western wall—most of them were and are 37.5 feet long, 18 feet wide, and 12 feet thick. They are stacked atop each other. It really was a “wow” place.

At that occasion—when the disciple draws the attention of Jesus and the others to the Temple stones and the magnificent building, Jesus asks them, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”

It was not about when or even how or even that the Temple would be destroyed. Indeed there are many religious folks who make much of that—and I believe they fall into the same trap as the disciples that day. These disciples go on to ask Jesus all kinds of questions of how it will come to be and what will take place in order for that to happen.

Jesus saying that these great buildings and the stone will all be down was a way of saying to them—“Get it, it is not about this, it is much bigger than this---it is far beyond all your ways of understanding how the world works and the powers that are---God is so beyond all your ways of understanding.”

It was as if he was asking them, “Do you get it? Do you get it that its about God? It is all about God—Do you get that?”

They did not get it? At least not then. But somehow after he was raised from the dead they got something—for they went on to live as the Body of Christ.

The real question is do we get it? Do we get it?

Hannah did.

Hannah got it. She understood somehow. The reality is no one understood her. Not Elkanah her husband—he did not get it. He could not understand how she was so upset about not having a child, after all he, Elkanah, loved her. Not necessarily required in a marriage those days—but he loved her—why did she have to get so upset about all this?

He did not get her.

Eli—the priest. The person who was supposed to understand. He failed her too. He could not recognize in her authentic prayer. He thought her simply a woman who had partied too much and made her way to the place of prayer. The priest did not get her.

Who did? God did—Hannah got that. She knew who to go to and who to go back to—year after year after year.

God was the one—the only one who truly got her—it was all about God. And she poured out her soul into that....

You see—it is the heart and soul of faith. That God gets us. God understands us. God knows us—even better than we know ourselves. God is true to us and there for us.

It is all about God.

So Hannah came back. Year after year after year---Hannah came back. Pouring out her heart and soul before God.

But why, why was Hannah’s prayer answered and so many are not? How is that she could keep praying for a child when year after year after year she turned up barren? How is that? And what if she never got a child? What then? What about her faith then?

Ah, don’t miss the detail of the text. It is in the details that we see Hannah. It says that after her praying, now understand this is before it has happened and she becomes pregnant—before that and after her praying the text says, “the woman rose, went to her quarters, ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer.”

What was it for Hannah? What was different?

Why would she get a child and others do not? The larger question is, of course, why are some prayers answered and others are not? Why are some people’s prayers answered and others are not?

Was it that she prayed more? Was it that her prayers were better? Was it that she had that double portion to present there at the tabernacle? What was it?

Well now—we have to look beyond the scope of just this portion of the passage to see the answer. There is something larger at play here. If we step back and take a look at not just the chapter, and not just the book

but take into account the whole Bible and the whole of salvation history— oh, when we do that we see that the child that Hannah would have fit into the larger picture of what God was doing.

The child that Hannah was to have fit into the larger picture of what God was doing.

And so year after year after year she came back. Yes her prayer was about having a child but even before that child was to come she had given that child up and given that child into the hands of what God was doing.

So she came back. And she came back.

Do we come back? Do we come back?

Do we get it that is about God who is in it all---it is about God who holds us and knows us.

Or do we get so caught up in the stones---do we get so caught up in that which is happening around us that miss or forget or get thrown off track—that God is the center.

Do we come back? And come back? And come back? And in that coming back do we see that it is all about how we fit into God's larger plan. All that we have and all that we are is about fitting into that plan that God has for our lives and our church and our community and our world.

There is a stewardship issue here. First, notice that Hannah did not show up to the tabernacle empty handed. She had a gift to give back as a way of recognizing that it really was not her's to begin with. But more than that—even before she had the child she had acknowledged that child

as not only a gift from God, but a gift to God. And she gave him up and gave him away.

And it was in that spirit that she prayed. That spirit of longing to fit into God's larger plan for her and for the whole of history. In that she keep coming back to her prayer.

It is the heart and soul of all this---that we come back to that place where we pour before God all that we are and all that we have and we ask God to fit us into God's larger plan for our life. That we ask God to take all that we are and all that we have and use it for God's glory and goodness.

That God is the heart and soul of it all—and as we pour out our soul—it needs to be to God.

Those disciples with warnings of tumbling stones—they would need to come back to that.

Before long that temple would no longer stand—it could not be locus and focus of their faith. The heart and soul of their faith had to be the extent to which they fit into the larger plan of God for their lives. So how they lived needed to steward that heart and soul of faith.

And as the stones of our templed lives tumble—we are to have such heart and soul of faith. God. God gets us---when no one or nothing else does---God has us and God is always faithful and we are to come back and pray that we live into God's plan for us. Amen.