

Introduction to the readings for the 25th Sunday after Pentecost, November 15, 2015

We begin with a backdrop to the Song of Hannah: ‘Hannah prays for a baby’, a story adapted from The Family Story Bible, Ralph Milton, Northstone Publishing Inc., 1996

(The story has further been adapted by our minister for our listening ears this morning.)

Hannah and Elkanah were happily married. Though they loved each other very much they were unable to have children.

For Elkanah, Hannah’s husband this was not so terrible for he had children from another wife. Still, Hannah found it difficult to accept given the cultural expectations of her era. And so it was, Hannah found herself praying desperately to God in the Temple at Shiloh that she might become a mother.

Thinking herself alone with God in the Temple Hannah began to sway as she prayed.

Now there was an elder in the Temple named Eli who became concerned about Hannah’s swaying back and forth as she prayed. Concerned, he approached Hannah and asked: “Is everything okay? Perhaps you had had some wine before coming to the Temple?”

In response Hannah assured him that this was not the case. She had just become so deeply involved in her conversation with God was all.

“Might I ask what your conversation with God was about then?” he asked.

In response, Hannah shared her distress at being childless and her longing for that to be different. Aware of her sense of despair Eli said: “I am certain God will respond to your prayer”.

Feeling more hopeful about the future than she had in a long time, Hannah returned home with her husband Elkanah.

A few months later, Hannah discovered that, indeed, that old Eli was right, God did answer her prayer.

To her great relief, she and Elkanah soon became parents of a baby boy. Once again, she offered prayers of deep gratitude to God for this outcome.

When her baby was born, Hannah felt an even more profound sense of thankfulness to God.

And so it was that Hannah named her baby son, ‘Samuel’, which in Hebrew means “we asked God for him.”

In this way, whenever Hannah spoke Samuel’s name, she reminded herself and everyone else that God had answered her prayers.

As Samuel grew from a baby to a toddler, Hannah became convinced that this wonderful gift from God named Samuel must be re-dedicated to God.

At the age of three, Samuel went back to the Temple at Shiloh with his mother, Hannah where Old Eli greeted them at the Temple Gate.

Scripture tells us that Hannah and Old Eli never stopped thanking God for the gift that was Samuel. Our reading for this morning concludes with the words of Hannah's song as she travels back home from the Temple at Shiloh.

Listen to how they describe Hannah's relationship with God full to the brim with thankfulness and hope. Think, too, of how Hannah's hopes and dreams for her son, Samuel, might remind us of another mother's song found in Luke's gospel, the song of Mary.

The Song of Hannah, adapted from 1 Samuel 2: verses 1-9:

"My heart rejoices in you and I am strengthened by your Presence.

My mouth belittles all that stands in my way, because, in You, I have value.

Praise to you, O Holy One.

You lift up the poor and the needy and set them among dignitaries and royalty;

You give them the seat of honour.

For the earth belongs to you and the world is established in your ways.

Praise to You, O Holy One.

Hear ends our adaptation of readings from our Hebrew texts this morning.

Let us continue to reflect on God's word for us this day as we anticipate singing our responsive hymn to the reading -found at **MV#120 My Soul Cries Out.**

Like the story of Hannah's Song, our gospel story was first heard by those early listeners living in a time of great chaos and turmoil some sixty to seventy years after Jesus walked the earth.

It was a time of great fear and danger for those early followers of the Way living under Roman Occupation.

Just as Samuel in our story from Hannah's life is a gift that bridges an old era to a new, Jesus speaks of the birth pangs of a new era being born.

Some scholars name this passage as one of the Doomsday scenarios. Others refer to this reading as the **Little Apocalypse** paving the way for God's coming revelation.

Still other scholars suggest we receive this story in the context of approaching the end of another year in the church calendar year and as we anticipate the birth of the season of Advent.

Listen for what captures your imagination about what constitutes faithful living as Jesus has a private conversation with the disciples in a rapidly changing context.

A reading from the gospel according to the author of Mark, Chapter 13, verses 1-8

“The beginning of the birth pangs”

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

When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?”

Then Jesus began to say to them, “Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place but the end is still to come.

For 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 birth pangs.

Hear ends our reading from Mark’s gospel this day.

Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the church.

Thanks be to God.