

1 Samuel 1:4-20; Mark 13:1-8

Grace to you and peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen

Our lesson tonight from 1 Samuel is one of those great stories in the Old Testament. It's the beginning of the story of the nation of Israel. The people have escaped from Egypt. They have been living on their own there. They took over the land of Canaan and they have been living there under the rule of the judges for many, many decades. But the judges are not the same as a king. The judges, while they are faithful people, aren't necessarily people who will *lead* the children of Israel in faith, and faith is a very important thing throughout the stories in Samuel.

There is a man, Elkanah, who has two wives (I have enough trouble with one): Hannah, whom he loves, who is apparently his first wife; and then Peninnah (don't name your kids these names, they're too difficult). Hannah whom he loves is not able to have children. We don't know why she is not having children. This is before, of course, we have fertility testing, this is before we know that it is really the guys who help determine whether or not the women can have children and it is the males too that determine whether or not it is a boy or a girl that is born, but they didn't know that at this time. A male really wants to have children and more importantly in that age a male wants to have male children so that male children could help out around the home, could more importantly carry on the name.

Hannah is not able to do that and that is why Peninnah comes into the play. She is able to produce children. She not only produces children, she really digs it into Hannah (not that anyone would ever do anything like that) "I have children and you don't, what do you think of that." This does not sit easily with Hannah.

Every year they go to make sacrifices. This is before the establishment of Jerusalem; this is before the building of the temple that we heard about in our Gospel lesson, so they didn't have to go to Jerusalem to do the sacrifices. They went up to a place called Shiloh to do their sacrifices, and there they made their sacrifices. While they are there it's really weighing on Hannah's heart that she can't have children and she goes to the temple and she begins to pray. She prays fervently, she prays passionately, she prays silently, but I can only imagine that she is praying so strongly that she can't hold still and tears are coming down her face and Eli, the priest who oversees the temple there at Shiloh, sees her and assumes that, here she is mouthing words, waving around, tears coming down her face. 'Well, this woman is obviously drunk,' he thinks, and he gets, I would think, rightly upset. Because who does she think she is coming into the temple making a spectacle of herself? So he berates her. But she replies, 'I am not drunk. I want a child. I want a child so desperately I would do anything.'

Eli listens to Hannah. Eli listens to her and he blesses her, and Hannah does this thing that only happens four other times in our scripture: Hannah makes a vow. She makes a promise to God, a sacred vow that, should God allow her to conceive, she will dedicate this child to the Lord God

Almighty. A strong and powerful thing to promise. This strong and passionate desire that Hannah had for a child. Hannah makes this vow to God, she takes Eli's blessing.

Hannah goes home and tells Elkanah nothing of this; she tells that (as my mother would say, witch with a capital B) *other* wife of his knew nothing about which she has just done, either. But Hannah and her husband have relations, and she conceives. She conceives a child and she is overjoyed, especially when she comes to find out nine months later that not only has she had a child, she has a boy, and she rejoices in the birth of this child. She rejoices and nurses him and loves him and holds on to him dearly.

Now the next year when they go to make their sacrifices once again up at Shiloh she begs off. She says 'Let me stay at home with my child one more year until he is weaned and then I will bring him to the temple and give him to the Lord.' Which she does the following year.

She arrives at the temple, she reintroduces herself to Eli, she reminds him of who she was and of the vow she had made and the blessing that he had given her, and then she entrusts this man with her son. This son of hers whom she has named Samuel, he is not her only child. She actually goes on to bear several more children. Once her womb is open she really starts popping out the kids. But God has heard her. God has heard this request, God has heard her vow and God fulfills the Devine portion of that vow, knowing that Hannah is going to fulfill her end. Samuel as you might remember goes on to become THE PREEMINENT prophet for the very first king of the country of Israel. He anoints not only the first king, Saul, but the second king, David.

Our story, tonight, is a story of pain and frustration, a story of faithfulness and answered prayer, reminds us that indeed God does answer our prayer. Sometimes the answer is a resounding "Yes." Sometimes, when we pray, we get a "No," and many times when we pray we get an overwhelming . . . *silence*. God does answer our prayers. God does work in our lives. God answers our prayer through scripture. God answers our prayer when we are in conversation with each other. God answers our prayer through more prayer. God answers us in our daily lives. God answers us with our own gifts and talents. But we also need to remember that often times our prayers are not answered in the manner in which we would anticipate.

There's a story of a rabbi who is on a journey. He was traveling with his donkey and his rooster. This rooster served as his alarm clock so that he could rise and do his daily devotions. On his way to the village he prayed that he would find a safe place to sleep that night, but he arrived at the village when the sun was setting, none of the villagers would welcome him into their homes. So he and his donkey and his rooster had to go and seek out a cave. That's where they spent the night. He lit a lamp to read a chapter for his prayers, but the wind came along and blew out his lamp. During the night, a wolf killed his rooster, a lion ate his donkey, he did not have, we might say, the best of nights. In the morning he returns to the village to see if he could now buy a new donkey and perhaps a rooster to continue his journey, but he was surprised to find no one in the village alive. During the night a band of robbers had come along and plundered the village and murdered the people. "Ah!" said the rabbi, "now I understand, my prayer was answered. Had the villagers not closed their doors against me, I would have died with them. If my light had not been extinguished, and my animals not been killed, the light, and their noise might have

revealed my hiding place to the robbers. For surely God has answered my prayers and gave me a safe place to sleep for the night.”

Hannah is our example of faithfulness in prayer. In faithfulness to talking with God, of faithfulness in expecting an answer, and in faithfulness of making good on our own word. Hannah is also an example of salvation. How Hope comes out of hopelessness. How Despair can be transformed into Thanksgiving and Praise. That child that Hannah had, Samuel? His name comes from the root of the word that means “to ask.” So Hannah reminds us don’t be afraid to ask God, don’t be afraid to talk to God, don’t be afraid to be in conversation with God. Just don’t be surprised, when God answers.

Amen.