

Proper 28, 2006

1 Samuel 1;4-20

1 Samuel 2; 1-10

Hebrews 10:11-14, 19-25

Mark 13:1-8

The passage we read in place of a Psalm is a canticle, Hannah's Song. It is strikingly similar to Mary's Song which we call the Magnificat in Luke 1:46-55. Hannah was married but barren. The other wife tormented her relentlessly about not having children and even though her husband tried to comfort her, she was in torment. When the family made the annual pilgrimage to Shiloh, Eli observed Hannah praying but thought she was merely drunk. Hannah persisted in telling Eli that she was troubled in heart and spirit because she was without a son. "If the Lord will only give me a child, I will return him to the Lord all the days of his life (1 Sam. 1:11). Eli told her the Lord would hear and answer her prayer.

In due time, Hannah had a son, named him Samuel, meaning God has heard, and when he was weaned she took him to be trained as a priest by Eli. Every year Hannah made a coat for Samuel and took it up on their annual pilgrimage.

One night while sleeping, Samuel heard a voice call his name. Thinking it was Eli, he went to the priest asking what he wanted. Twice, Eli sent Samuel back to bed, supposing it was merely a dream. The third time, Eli understood and told Samuel, if this happens again, answer, Speak Lord for your servant is listening. The next morning, Samuel told Eli that the message was that the Lord was not pleased and was about to do a thing in Israel at which the ears of every one that hears it will tingle (1 Sam 3;11). Samuel experienced a call and served as a wise leader in Israel. When Eli's sons were killed in a battle in which the Philistine enemy took the Ark of the Covenant, Eli fainted, hit his head on a rock and died. Samuel succeeded Eli as the high Priest and the last Judge of Israel.

Judges exercised influence over the tribes of Israel because of their strong personality, moral stature, and belief that they had direct access to the Lord. They were able to rally the tribes in self-defence, and to settle disputes. In time the people asked Samuel to anoint a king for Israel so they would have a ruler like all other nations. Samuel warned that a king would abuse power, take sons as soldiers and extract high taxes but the elders insisted. Samuel called the people together and drew lots and thus

Saul was anointed the first king of Israel (1 Sam 10:21). There was a lot of conflict between Samuel and Saul – a foretaste of the conflict between church and state. Saul's daughter was married to David who would become the great king David.

Hannah prayed for a son and then offered this most precious gift back to God. The firstborn son in many centuries of tradition has been offered to the church. It is perhaps a tradition taken from the sacrifice of the best of the flock in ancient customs and religious practice. I have a hard time understanding the intention of Hannah. Was Samuel a gift from God that she gave to God in thanksgiving? Was Samuel proof that she was really approved by God as a wife, mother, and full woman? Did having a son improve her status at home, with her husband, in the community? Did having a child change her self-image?

Samuel was special in the account of the text – was called in a dream – by a voice – confirmed by a mentor to be a priest. It was not that Samuel was a priest because his mother gave him to Eli for training but because God called out to Samuel directly. The mentor understood the call before Samuel knew what it was all about. The call of God for mission and ministry may come as a small voice, a heart felt passion, a voice of a friend, in a dream, in community. God calls in a way that reaches the subject. Each of us should ask what God is calling us to do – individually, collectively as a parish, and corporately as a church.

A call takes in the past, the present, and the future. The call points from a current position that aligns God's plan and our availability. It takes confirmation, affirmation, and faith. We hope for a future in which God will bring peace, justice, and the hope of Hannah as well as Mary is a vision of that. Hannah and Mary sing a vision of justice, of peace, and a righteous community. The son of Mary, Jesus, lives in a time of Roman occupation, wherein the people of Israel are suppressed and oppressed. The *pax Romana* only works with respect to Roman law and order which does not create equality or justice. Jesus is responsive to the needs of those on the margins of this hierarchical society. Jesus treats, the sick, the well, the rich the poor, women and men equally. .. with dignity and respect. Jesus knew that if we want a world of justice and peace we must stand for change in the present.

In our time, with history of WWI, WWII, Holocaust, bombing of Japan, and a series of other wars, epidemic, economic struggle, and violence makes us afraid for our

children and we wonder about our future. Again we are at war, we worry about terrorism, and where God is in all of this. What do we hope for? Hannah hoped for a son. Mary and Hannah hoped for their vision of peace and justice. We hope and this inspires us to work for that same vision simply because it is good. We work for the kingdom of God, even when afraid, even if at war, even in suffering, because we know that God is present in the past, in the present and in the future.

When Jesus looked at the temple and talked about its' destruction, the disciples were startled. The passage has been labeled by German scholars as eschatology (1804) and apocalyptic (1852). Apocalypse is a literary genre in which an author, usually pseudonymous, reports symbolic dreams or visions, given or interpreted through angelic mediator, which reveal heavenly mysteries that can make sense of earthly realities. Eschatology and apocalyptic writings posit temporal dimensions that speak to the value of time.

To understand the passage in Mark 13, we need to ask how peasant people in Jesus' day perceived time. They lived in the present. Any notion of "end" was an end to a current circumstance. The present was judged by the past. God is in control, even when things seem out of control, even if God seems absent, or an evil force is winning, the truth is God is faithful to God's promises. In a time of persecution and spiritual turmoil, vision by a seer call us to endure, the message is – this too will pass. In the unfolding story of the life-death-resurrection of Jesus, the persecution and spiritual turmoil in respect to time has not happened – at least not the climatic event of the cross. The focus of Jesus' words here is the temple. The expectation is a war that will overthrow the temple and the city of Jerusalem. There is no coded language, just ordinary terms. No symbolism, none of the apocalypse features are in this passage. Eschatology expects an imminent end. Mark 13 is a farewell discourse. We are nearing the account of Jesus' death and his comments about the fate of Jerusalem. Ancients saw creation as one piece, the earth, the enveloping sky, and thus if God was in the heavens, he spoke or interacted with the earth through a hole in the sky, e.g. the tablets of Moses, the ladder of Jacob, the dove at the baptism of Jesus and the darkness on earth at his death. So too would the return be.

The ancients believed that a person near death was capable of knowing what is going to happen because they are nearer the realm of God. Xenophon, Heracles,

Socrates in their respective death scenes made speeches. In our time, it is a last will and testament. Jesus came first to the house of Israel and it is Israel that he is addressing.

What do you wish for? What would make your life complete? What would affirm your call and role in bringing about the kingdom of God? What has to change if the peace and justice that were the common vision of Hannah, Mary, and Jesus were to come to pass in our day? What would it be like to know that God is here – now, has been part of our lives from the beginning and will be with us to the end? God is in every minute, every circumstance, of life. God was our beginning and God is our end.