

Sermon by The Rev. Bollin M. Millner, Jr
Grace and Holy Trinity Church
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The Collect

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Old Testament

1 Samuel 1:4-20

On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; but to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb. Her rival used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. So 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. Her 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?"

After 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. She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD, and wept bitterly. She 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."

As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk. So Eli said to her, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine." But 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. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time." Then Eli answered, "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him." And 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.

They 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. In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the LORD."

The Response

1 Samuel 2:1-10

Hannah prayed and said,

“My heart exults in the LORD;
my strength is exalted in my God.
“There is no Holy One like the LORD,
no one besides you;
there is no Rock like our God.
Talk no more so very proudly,
let not arrogance come from your mouth;
for the LORD is a God of knowledge,
and by him actions are weighed.
The bows of the mighty are broken,
but the feeble gird on strength.
Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,
but those who were hungry are fat with spoil.
The barren has borne seven,
but she who has many children is forlorn.
The LORD kills and brings to life;
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.
The LORD makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low, he also exalts.
He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap,
to make them sit with princes
and inherit a seat of honor.
For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's,
and on them he has set the world.
“He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness;
for not by might does one prevail.
The LORD! His adversaries shall be shattered;
the Most High will thunder in heaven.
The LORD will judge the ends of the earth;
he will give strength to his king,
and exalt the power of his anointed.”

The Epistle

Hebrews 10:11-14 (15-18) 19-25

Every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, “he sat down at the right hand of God,” and since then has been waiting “until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.” For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. [And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying,

“This is the covenant that I will make with them
after those days, says the Lord:
I will put my laws in their hearts,
and I will write them on their minds,”

he also adds,

“I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”

Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.]

Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

The Gospel

Mark 13:1-8

As Jesus came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large 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 birthpangs.”

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Near the beginning of every offering of the Holy Eucharist, we offer a Collect...a prayer, which gathers the community together, perhaps even collects the themes for the day.

Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, in the 1500s, the architect of the first English Books of Common prayer, translated Collects from Latin into English, and bequeathed them to us. And of course those Latin collects go back to the earliest days of the church in the west.

Cranmer also composed some collects, and it seems the one for today, which is one of my personal favorites, comes from his hand. It represents the interests of the Protestant reformation in the primacy of Scripture. “Blessed Lord who caused ALL Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning...may we read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the promise of life...”

This Collect commends all holy scripture to us, because by the high middle ages, there were so many saints days, with their own prescribed readings, that the people never heard the full narrative in scripture. They were constantly jumping around...the story was interrupted so often, that in essence, there was no story at all.

So it was a call to embrace the whole story, and not just in bits and pieces. The collect also urges that we read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the scriptures. We are literally to be soaked in the biblical story. It is to be our primary source and story, the ground upon which everything else grows.

I can't hear this prayer without thinking of a personal story from my seminary days at Virginia. I've shared this with you. But a professor was lecturing and constantly referencing biblical stories, when finally this student raised his hand to ask a question. “Professor, I don't know the stories you are talking about so you are going to have to help me.” And the professor said, “You are going to have to help yourself. My recommendation is that starting today, you get out your bible, and read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest it.”

And that is not just for seminarians, we all benefit by reading, marking, learning, and inwardly digesting scripture. For my money, the best way to do that is through the Daily Office Lectionary. It is in the Prayer Book...so reach for that if you would...and turn to page 936.

You can also incorporate the Sunday readings into your discipline, so that when you come to church, you are not hearing them for the first time. The Sunday lectionary is not in the Prayer Book, it used to be, but a few years back we adopted the Revised Common Lectionary, which is a positive

advance, because it does get more of the scripture narrative in front of the church on Sundays. So that is another way to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest.

We certainly are greeted by an abundance of wealth in our readings for today. In the Gospel, we have the prophetic words of Jesus, predicting the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem...Jesus was an astute observer of the signs of the times, and he knew that radical, violent rebellion against Rome, a path that was becoming more and more inevitable, would end badly.

We also have that marvelous and marvelously complicated sermon, the Book of Hebrews, with these words of good news: "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more. Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin."

And then...we have the privilege of meeting more amazing women. Last week, it was Ruth and Naomi, this week, it is Hannah.

You remember that the status and security of women in the ancient near eastern world was tied to relationships with men. Polygamy was practiced and that was a good thing in the sense that one man could provide security for more than one woman as wife.

Elkanah had two wives, Peninnah and Hannah. Peninnah had daughters and sons, and Hannah didn't have children, so she used to be abused and ridiculed by Peninnah. At the same time, Elkanah really preferred Hannah and would give her a double portion of food. So good on him for not letting societal expectations and judgments get in the way of his love. Still it doesn't take much to imagine how that went over in the larger family. I am sure there were all kinds of interesting dynamics. Any therapists in the house?

Long story short, Hannah does end up having a son...it is the prediction of that by Eli the priest we heard today...the child's name is Samuel. Samuel became the last of the great judges or leaders in Israel and of course, two

books in the Bible bear his name. His mother dedicated him to the Temple and that is where he spent most of his years growing up.

We heard as our response to the reading today, where we usually have something from the Book of Psalms, we offered something from I Samuel. It follows on the reading and was the song of Hannah, where even as she lets her son go and dedicates him to the Temple, she gives thanks for her blessing of a child. The Song of Mary, the Magnificat, is modeled on Hannah's song.

This song is striking. The Lord "raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor."

I heard something very similar to this Song of Hannah, last Tuesday night. This by the way, is why we read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest Holy Scripture, because it helps us make these connection in our own lives. It is not about living in the past, but being faithful in the present and drawn toward God's glorious future. At any rate, I heard Hannah last Tuesday. It was graduation day for CirclesRVA.

CirclesRVA is a community organization, which enjoys strong support from non-religious organizations and also from a number of churches, including GHTC and St. Paul's. We support it as a part of our Strategic Plan.

The first class or cohort of Circle Leaders has been launched and right now, Circles is meeting right here, in our parish hall. Circles is a process of enlisting folks who wish to move to financial stability, called Leaders...and they set the direction for themselves...Leaders go through orientation...come out with an actionable plan...and then they are united with Allies who provide cheerleading and social networks as the plan is implemented.

Last Tuesday was graduation day for the Leaders from the first phase, the 12 week orientation where they develop their plan for financial stability. One after the other, the Leaders shared their "vision boards" and expressed their hope and determination.

The obstacles these Leaders face are formidable. And yet they were filled with gratitude, to Circles, for providing exactly what they needed...orientation, training, allies...and also to this church for being the place where they could come, with their children, enjoy a meal, and do the work.

They are one of the most impressive group of people I've ever heard. And the next step, continuing out over the next year, is for them to be united with their allies, and work the plan. It is transformative and you should be proud to be part of a church that is helping, along with many others, to make this possible.

And maybe it is because I was thinking about and reading the lessons for this Sunday, or maybe it was the Holy Spirit, it was of course both...But in everything those Leaders, those strong women were saying on Tuesday night, I heard the song, Hannah's song, The Lord "raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor." Amen.