

Scripture Readings and Sermon

November 14, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on 1 Samuel 1:9-18 (Hannah's prayer is answered)

Hannah's prayer brings up several questions when the previous verses are included. In verse 5 it states that the LORD prevented Hannah from having a child. There is no reason given for this but rather the focus is on how much Hannah was ridiculed by her husband's other wife and children. It states that year after year they would go to sacrifice to the LORD and each year Hannah would endure ridicule. When this reading takes place, Hannah is at her breaking point and offers not just a burnt sacrifice but her son as a nazirite. Nazirite in Numbers 6 is where the idea for monks and nuns came from. People who are solely dedicated and consecrated to serving God. The most famous example of a nazirite is Samson although according to description it is likely that John the Baptist was also a nazirite. The issue with Samson's hair had nothing to do with hair but instead represented Samson breaking his nazirite vows. Alcohol, especially anything associated with grapes, was strictly forbidden which is why the accusation that Hannah is drunk rather than in extreme distress is so ironic. It should finally be noted that while the burnt offerings were done before Eli's sons who had lost favor with the LORD, Hannah is blessed this time by Eli.

1 Samuel 1:17 Then Eli answered, "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him."

Who has given you a word of assurance when you needed it?

Why was Eli's blessing more significant than the priests or even her husband?

What does it mean to be a blessing to others?

Do we sometimes underestimate the power of words of assurance and encouragement?

Who needs God's good news in their life today?

Commentary on Hebrews 10:14-25 (Full Assurance)

How the terms perfected and sanctified are used in Hebrews is revealed in the rest of the text. The term perfected is related to putting "my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds". This is again repeated in the reference to "a true heart in full assurance". In this context, perfection deals with the state of the heart from which good (perfected) and evil (broken) flow according to Jesus (Matthew 5:28). The heart can only be perfected if it has first been sanctified. Sanctification is the removal of sin, "remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more" and "clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water". Perfection and sanctification are the results of forgiveness offered through Jesus' offering, his blood, "his flesh". If, therefore, Jesus' offering forgives our sins sanctifying our hearts so that our hearts can be perfected in the law of love, then we should "provoke one another to love and good deeds" which is the summation of the law.

Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds

How does the use of the word provoke with love make you feel?

How can we provoke people to love and do good deeds?

What is the role of shame in this understanding of provoke?

What is the role of encouragement and mentoring?

When have you provoked or been provoked by others into loving and good deeds?

Commentary on Mark 13:1-8 (End times)

Jesus' statement about the destruction of the temple is misquoted twice after he tells the disciples. In the next chapter, the statement will be used against him during his trial (14:58) and then

will be used as an insult during his crucifixion (15:29). Connecting the temple destruction to the beginning of persecutions can be linked to Jesus' death, it is more likely that Mark revealing to the persecuted early Christian community after the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. how Jesus knew this would happen. This revealing or in Greek “apocalypse” often provides reassurance to the people of God that even periods of tribulations are part of God's plan toward salvation just as birth pangs proceed new life. In this context, the primary false “god” is Nero who in his madness viewed himself as a deity. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, as soon as Nero took the throne in AD 54, many false Messiahs entered Jerusalem and great natural disasters began to take place, famines, pestilence and earthquakes. Six years before the destruction of the Temple, Nero burned Rome and blamed the Christian community in Rome around the same time as Paul's death (scholars vary between 62-67) beginning the time of persecution for the Christian community. In the midst of all the uncertainty, Jesus' words provide the assurance that God is in control. One more thing of interest to note is that this is the only time Andrew is included with Peter, James, and John.

Mark 13:5 Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray."

Have you ever been led astray? Seen someone else?

Why did the idea appeal to you/them?

What made you/them realize that it was a dead end path?

By understanding yourself, can you avoid being led astray?

By knowing Jesus, is it easier to discern false hopes and promises?

Reflection on Mark 13:1-8, Hebrews 10:14-25, 1 Samuel 1:9-18

Sermon “Uncertain Times”

The sayings go that “there is a light at the end of the tunnel” and “in the end it will be okay so if it is not okay then it is not the end”. These sayings are meant to give encouragement during uncertain times. But sometimes in the midst of these times people simply want to know “are we there yet?”. This was probably the case for the early Christian community during the day of Nero when Christians were burned on stakes, there were natural disasters, and the great Temple was destroyed. They were waiting for Jesus but they still wanted to know “how long?”.

In the Gospel, Mark reminds the early church that Jesus knew these things were going to happen. Instead of saying that it would be temporary, Jesus said it was just the “beginning of the birth pangs”. Faith is a marathon and not a sprint especially during uncertain times. When one calamity after another seem to come in waves, however, people begin to seek other messiahs. Desperate people begin to surrender their liberties and free will for the promise of an end to suffering. History books are filled with leaders who were viewed by some as saviors because of their promises of a better time. If you are like me, you may have bought into these promises at one time in your life. In the end, however, all these promises come up empty.

Year after year Hannah had gone up to the Tabernacle of the LORD to make sacrifices hoping for a child. Year after year she was mocked by those around her. Rather than turning to a Canaanite deity or giving up on the LORD, Hannah prayed directly to God. She knew that her help would not come from false prophets with false promises. What Eli saw as drunkenness was actually the deep anguish of her soul laid bare before the LORD. This anguish cut through Eli's poor sight and hearing to remind him of the God he served. Just as the church today, Eli was called to proclaim that even during uncertain times peace can be found in God.

This peace of God during uncertain times is made possible through Jesus Christ. Jesus' sacrifice revealed a God that who would always keep God's promises even when we did our best to reject him. Jesus revealed that God's faithfulness and forgiveness is great than all of our rebellion and sin. Our hearts have been sanctified and our slate has been wiped clean. In place of rebellion, God loving

assurance has been poured into our lives. This assurance and peace surpasses all the uncertainty of the world around us. Even during the worst of times when it seems like love in the world has dried up, a well of love still springs forth from a heart rooted in Christ. From this heart, like Eli, we can proclaim peace and love. We can do good works produced by grace no matter what is going on in the world. In the midst of uncertain times, we can find an unwavering certainty in the Rock of our faith, Jesus Christ. When we provoke one another in love and good deeds, we shine a light so that others might find certainty in that same Rock.