



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON

11-15-15

“From a Child the new is born”

Page 213

Let us consider the most wonderful story of Hannah, the wife of Elkanah—the barren and beloved wife of Elkanah — who continues to long for a child. And at the very start we learn how cared for and well treated Hannah is by her husband. She is someone who might be considered comfortable — she is provided for and loved. There are no demands on her to be other than she is — which is unusual in a culture that values women who can produce workers and inheritors. But to Hannah this comfort is not enough. She weeps and refuses to eat because she wants to bear a child. So, she prays and boy, does she pray.

Pay attention to her prayer. She goes to the temple of the Lord to pray. People come into this church to pray. I believe there is something sacred about going apart to pray — not necessary but helpful. And then Hannah pours out her soul to God. She pours out her soul — offering the longing of her heart as a sacrifice to God. She will share any child born to her, but she is asking for God to consider her distress, her hopes, anxiety. Hannah’s prayer is so deep that words cannot contain it — she prays without language — she prays beyond culture and correctness and traditions — she shares it all with God. She is willing to be vulnerable and honest with God about her heart’s desire. And she is willing to offer back to God her future. “All things come of thee o lord and of thine own have we given thee.” And Eli as the priest blesses her and send her away in peace. Hannah departs with her countenance no longer sad. She has found peace. She has been heard. She conceives and child and names him Samuel. And life is never the same for Hannah.

For this child of hers ushers in the new — new joy, new possibilities, new life, new light into this world. For from her child the new is born — not just as an answer to her prayer but as a gift to the entire world. Hannah’s longing was not just for herself but that God would be a part of whatever came her way. And Samuel came her way and he came to the kingdom of Israel. The miraculous birth of this child provides a flickering hope for humanity at that place and time, the possibility of a new beginning.

Israel has struggled under a long succession of wicked and spiritually corrupt rulers. At the start of the book of Samuel we learn that the word of the Lord was not heard in those days, and Eli, the high priest, was losing his eyesight and his ability to guide the people. His two sons, Hophni and Phinehas — were truly corrupt in their duties at the temple and Eli knows this and knows they will need to be punished, yet in his old age he is unable to change them. It provides a reason to

why Eli accused Hannah of being drunk. He could no longer recognize true prayer and devotion because of the hopeless state of his nation and temple. Yet Hannah in her honesty corrects this high priest and he acknowledges her prayer.

Although Eli will be toppled from power and position, for many years he ends up serving as the mentor and guide to Samuel, soon realizing the abiding faith of Samuel and that the presence of God is directing Samuel's words and actions. It is Samuel who will be sent to as a prophet to anoint David – King David who turns the kingdom around and sets the stage for the birth of Jesus – one of his descendants.

For from this child the new is born. And this song of Hannah – the words we read today instead of a Psalm – recognize that God will through down the rich and corrupt and usher in a new kingdom of justice, a kingdom based again on righteous foundations.

This wonderful woman that is unafraid to seek the new foreshadows the faithful women who will come after her bearing children to bring the new into the world – like Esther, and Ruth, Elizabeth and Mary. This song of Hannah is echoed in the song of Mary called the Magnificat. Both speak of the work of faithful longing and the deeper work of the loving God who shapes all things – the God who hears our prayers, the God who remains present to bring to life something new.

This story is a story of hopefulness, of courage, of honesty, of sacrifice and trust, of willingness to be changed, of willingness to pour out our souls directly to God. It is a story than can speak directly to each of us.

When we pour out our heart before God, are we ready to be changed? Are we ready to give or share what is dear to us? Are we ready to enter into the new both with joy and delight and with fear and trembling? Are we ready to wait, wait for the child to be born and the new to come?

Thanks be to God.