

Sunday 15th January 2012

6.30 p.m.

Laurieston Parish Church

Evening Worship with Sacrament of Holy Communion

Welcome/Notices

.....

Introit: Be still, for the presence of the Lord (Hy. 189: 1&3)

Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One is here.
Come, bow before him now with reverence and fear.
In him no sin is found; we stand on holy ground.
Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One is here.

Be still, for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place.
He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister his grace:
no work too hard for him; in faith receive from him.
Be still, for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place.

.....

Call to Worship:

- ◆ 'Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening'
- ◆ This morning we heard the well-known story of the boy Samuel in the temple, open to hearing God's voice in a way that the old man, Eli, the priest, had long since forgotten and stopped expecting to happen.
- ◆ We're going to look this evening at some other aspects of the story, but we remind ourselves of the gist of it as we sing the old Sunday School hymn, printed on the sheet.

.....

HYMN:

CH3 #123

Hushed was the evening hymn, the temple courts were dark,
the lamp was burning dim before the sacred ark,
when suddenly a voice divine
rang through the silence of the shrine.

The old man, meek and mild, the priest of Israel, slept;
his watch the temple child, the little Levite, kept;
and what from Eli's sense was sealed
the Lord to Hannah's son revealed.

O give me Samuel's ear, the open ear, O Lord,
alive and quick to hear each whisper of thy word;
like him to answer at thy call,
and to obey thee first of all.

O give me Samuel's heart, a lowly heart, that waits
where in thy house thou art or watches at thy gates
by day and night; a heart that still
moves at the breathing of thy will.

O give me Samuel's mind, a sweet, unmurmuring faith,
obedient and resigned to thee in life and death;
that I may read with childlike eyes
truths that are hidden from the wise.

.....

Introduction

- ◆ The reason Samuel was there in the temple, and not at home with his parents Hannah and Elkanah, his three younger brothers and two sisters goes back to the circumstances of his birth.
- ◆ Elkanah had two wives - which was common enough in those days - but this story is as good an argument as any for

monogamy, because there was terrible rivalry between the two women.

- ◆ it stemmed from the fact that one of them, Penninah, had children, and the other, Hannah, had so far not been able to have any.
- ◆ That can be enough of a sorrow even now, and couples who want children will go to extreme lengths to try to have them, but in Old Testament times, there was a massive stigma attached to being childless;
- ◆ children were seen as a blessing from God, which is fine; but the reverse was also thought to be true: if you didn't have children, it must be a sign of God's disfavour.
- ◆ And to make matters worse for Hannah, on top of her own sadness, and her sense of shame, she had Penninah rubbing salt in the wound whenever she got the chance.
- ◆ Religious festivals were particularly bad (just as Christmas can be for people in the same situation nowadays)
- ◆ they were a devout family, and once a year they all went to the temple at Shiloh. Elkanah would offer a sacrifice, then did what he had to do - even though it broke his heart to see how upset Hannah was - he divide up the meat, giving several portions to Penninah for herself and her children, and only one to Hannah, who was so upset that she would cry and refuse to eat.
- ◆ Poor Elkanah was beside himself; caught between the two women. He obviously cared about Hannah, but didn't really understand and certainly didn't know how to help.
- ◆ "Why are you crying, Hannah?", he said, "Why won't you eat? Why are you always so sad? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"
- ◆ Then one year, it all came to a head, and something remarkable happened:

Reading: 1 Samuel 1: 9 - 18 Hannah's story p. 264

One time, after they had finished their meal in the house of the Lord at Shiloh, Hannah got up. She was deeply distressed, and she cried bitterly as she prayed to the Lord. Meanwhile, Eli the priest was sitting in his place by the door. Hannah made a solemn promise: "Lord Almighty, look at me, your servant! See my trouble and remember me! Don't forget me! If you give me a son, I promise that I will dedicate him to you for his whole life and that he will never have his hair cut." Hannah continued to pray to the Lord for a long time, and Eli watched her lips. She was praying silently; her lips were moving, but she made no sound. So Eli thought that she was drunk, and he said to her, "Stop making a drunken show of yourself! Stop your drinking and sober up!" "No, I'm not drunk, sir," she answered. "I haven't been drinking! I am desperate, and I have been praying, pouring out my troubles to the Lord. Don't think I am a worthless woman. I have been praying like this because I'm so miserable." "Go in peace," Eli said, "and may the God of Israel give you what you have asked him for." "May you always think kindly of me," she replied. Then she went away, ate some food, and was no longer sad.

.....

Reflection

- ◆ something had clearly changed for Hannah, because she ate and felt better before she knew that she was pregnant; before she and Elkanah went home and Samuel was conceived.
- ◆ that makes some sense at a purely human level; if she was more relaxed, perhaps there was a better chance of becoming pregnant, but in terms of the story, what mattered was the promise she had made to God.
- ◆ She had promised that if she had a son, he would be dedicated to God; he would live in the Temple and would live as a Nazirite which meant:

- ◆ abstaining from alcohol;
- ◆ not having his hair cut;
- ◆ avoiding graves and corpses (incl. family members)
- ◆ making certain offerings as part of consecration to God
- ◆ We can only imagine what it must have been like for Hannah to have her precious son at last, and then have to let him go;
- ◆ she kept him with her as long as she could - until after he was weaned (which w/b older then than now) - then took him back to Shiloh, with a three-year-old bull; ten kilogrammes of flour and a leather bag full of wine.
- ◆ Her heart must have been breaking, and yet her song, recorded in Chapter 2, has nothing but joy in it.
- ◆ It will sound quite familiar to you, because it has close echoes with Mary's hymn of praise in Luke's gospel, which we know as the magnificat:
- ◆ It sounds as though she is singing a familiar Psalm:

**THE LORD HAS FILLED MY HEART WITH JOY;
HOW HAPPY I AM BECAUSE OF WHAT HE HAS DONE!**

I laugh at my enemies;

how joyful I am because God has helped me!

NO ONE IS HOLY LIKE THE LORD;

THERE IS NONE LIKE HIM, NO PROTECTOR LIKE OUR GOD.

Stop your loud boasting; silence your proud words.

**FOR THE LORD IS A GOD WHO KNOWS,
AND HE JUDGES ALL THAT PEOPLE DO.**

The bows of strong soldiers are broken,
but the weak grow strong.

**THE PEOPLE WHO ONCE WERE WELL FED
NOW HIRE THEMSELVES OUT TO GET FOOD,
BUT THE HUNGRY ARE HUNGRY NO MORE.**

The childless wife has borne seven children,
but the mother of many is left with none.

**THE LORD KILLS AND RESTORES TO LIFE;
HE SENDS PEOPLE TO THE WORLD OF THE DEAD
AND BRINGS THEM BACK AGAIN.**

He makes some people poor and others rich;
he humbles some and makes others great.

**HE LIFTS THE POOR FROM THE DUST
AND RAISES THE NEEDY FROM THEIR MISERY.**

He makes them companions of princes
and puts them in places of honour.

**THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE EARTH BELONG TO THE LORD;
ON THEM HE HAS BUILT THE WORLD.**

.....

LET US PRAY:

Eternal God, with Hannah, and with Mary, with countless generations of women and men who have called to you in their distress, or heard you calling to them, lifting them out of the safe comfort of their humdrum, everyday living, into new adventures of discipleship and service, we bring our thanks and praise tonight.

We praise you for your greatness and power, though we cannot pretend to understand how those work themselves out in a world in which there is so much inequality; so much that seems random and out of control.

We praise you for Hannah and Mary's vision of a world in which all the usual structures of power are turned on their heads: where the hungry are fed, and the greedy go hungry; where the mighty are cast down and the humble lifted high. And for Mary's son, who, more than any other person who ever lived, managed to make that vision a reality:

- ◆ who told sinners that they were forgiven; and religious people that they needed to be;

- ◆ who told rich people to give away their money; and showed poor people where real wealth was to be found;
- ◆ who treated kings and emperors like ordinary people; and ordinary people like kings and queens.
- ◆ who played with children, and laughed at those who took themselves too seriously.
- ◆ who let go of his life in order that we might live more fully;
- ◆ and who told his friends to remember him, not in church, but whenever they shared a meal together, as they had done so often with him.

Loving God, accept our praises; and help us to be faithful to Christ and his new way of being. In his own name we pray. AMEN

.....

HYMN 286: Tell out my soul

.....

Introduction

- ◆ Meanwhile, what about the other character in the story: Eli, the old priest, who had been so wrong about Hannah, thinking she was drunk, but was at least prepared to listen; to admit that he had been wrong
- ◆ and once he knew her story, he wished her well.
- ◆ There must have been something about him that was able to reach Hannah in her misery, because It was after she had spoken to Eli, and he had given her his blessing that she calmed down, and had something to eat, and came out of her terrible depression.
- ◆ Several years later, it was Eli to whom Hannah handed over her precious child, and we have to hope that there was someone else around the place who would look out for the boy, because Eli didn't have a very good track record with his own sons.

- ◆ They are described as 'scoundrels'. All they were interested in was what they could get for themselves.
- ◆ When people came with offerings to the temple, they were in there to take whatever they could get for themselves
- ◆ they got their servant to go in with a big three-pronged fork and take the meat out of the cooking-pot; they insisted it should be roasted, not boiled, with all the fat left on.
- ◆ And Eli couldn't do a thing to stop them; they paid no attention to him whatsoever:

Reading: 1 Samuel 2: 22 - 26 Eli's story p. 266

Eli was now very old. He kept hearing about everything his sons were doing to the Israelites and that they were even sleeping with the women who worked at the entrance to the Tent of the Lord's presence. So he said to them, "Why are you doing these things? Everybody tells me about the evil you are doing. Stop it, my sons! This is an awful thing the people of the Lord are talking about! If anyone sins against someone else, God can defend the one who is wrong; but who can defend someone who sins against the Lord?" But they would not listen to their father, for the Lord had decided to kill them. The boy Samuel continued to grow and to gain favour both with the Lord and with people.

.....

Reflection:

- ◆ Eli wasn't a bad man, but he was old and tired, and seems to have given up on life - certainly on his ne'er-do-well sons
- ◆ he was kind to Hannah when she and Elkanah came once a year to see their son, bringing a new little robe for him
- ◆ "Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say to Elkanah, "May the Lord give you other children by this woman to take the place of the one you dedicated to him."
- ◆ It's interesting that he said it to Elkanah, not to Hannah.

- ◆ We don't know what she thought about it, or whether the other children that she had - three sons and two daughters - ever did make up for having to hand Samuel over to God
- ◆ but the boy did well - and again there are echoes of Luke's story of Jesus' childhood: "The boy Samuel continued to grow and to gain favour both with the Lord and with men."
- ◆ Eli was slow - very slow - to realise what was happening the night that God called Samuel for the first time - he kept sending him back to bed (we had fun with that in Redding this morning).
- ◆ But when he eventually did catch on, and realise that God was calling Samuel, he helped the boy as much as he could; told him what to say, and how to listen for God's voice.
- ◆ And when Samuel very tentatively passed on the message that God had given - the news that Eli and his sons were to be punished with death - he accepted that too - almost as though he knew what was coming:
- ◆ "He is the Lord. He will do whatever seems best to him."

.....

LET US PRAY:

God, we thank you, as so often, for the flawed and fallible people that appear in the pages of the Bible story: people like Eli, old and tired, disappointed in his sons, unable to control them, someone who had long since given up expecting good things to happen.

Nevertheless, he was part of Samuel's story, and part of your plan for your people, and ultimately for us. We remember him for his kindness to Hannah and her precious son; for his being able to recognise your call to someone else, even if that way of service was no longer open to him or to his family. And we remember his willingness to hear the truth of your word, and to accept your will, however hard it must have been for him.

Loving God, we too are a mixture of weak and strong; faithful and faithless; trusting and doubting; selfish and generous; foolish and wise. We ask that you will take those kernels of goodness and help them to grow; that you will take our strengths and build on them, without us ever losing the humility that comes from remembering just how weak and foolish we have been and can still be.

May we be open to your voice, and faithful to your call, while at the same time nurturing and encouraging others who may be able to do more than we will ever achieve. We are glad to be part of the one body with young Samuel and old Eli; with impetuous Peter and obsessive Paul; busy Martha and dreamy Mary; peaceful Francis and fiery Knox... all the random assortment of saints who, each in different ways, according to their personality and their time, have heard your call to service, and answered, 'Here I am, send me.'

Lord, if you have something to say to us here tonight, may we be listening and ready to respond according to your will for us. We ask it in Jesus' name. AMEN

.....

HYMN 484: Great God, your love has called us here

.....

Introduction

- ◆ We take a great leap forward in time now; from the semi-mythical times of Eli and Samuel to the first-century church in Corinth.
- ◆ Reading the letters in the New Testament is a bit like hearing one side of a phone-call, but not the other. We know what Paul's answers are, but not what questions he may have been asked; we have to read between the lines to work out what problems the Christians in each place were facing.

- ◆ In the case of Corinth, there is much more detail than usual.
- ◆ We're told quite a lot about what was happening in the church there, and it wasn't good at all.
- ◆ Listen to what Paul has to say about what was happening when they met together for worship:

Reading: 1 Corinthians 11: 17-22 The Lord's Supper p. 215
 In the following instructions, however, I do not praise you, because your meetings for worship actually do more harm than good. In the first place, I have been told that there are opposing groups in your meetings; and this I believe is partly true (No doubt there must be divisions among you so that the ones who are in the right may be clearly seen.) When you meet together as a group, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat. For as you eat, you each go ahead with your own meal, so that some are hungry while others get drunk. Don't you have your own homes in which to eat and drink? Or would you rather despise the church of God and put to shame the people who are in need? What do you expect me to say to you about this? Shall I praise you? Of course I don't!

.....

Reflection

- ◆ That is the context in which Paul gives the instructions that we know so well about how the Christian fellowship meal is to be celebrated:

FOR I RECEIVED FROM THE LORD THE TEACHING THAT I PASSED ON TO YOU: THAT THE LORD JESUS, ON THE NIGHT HE WAS BETRAYED, TOOK A PIECE OF BREAD, GAVE THANKS TO GOD, BROKE IT, AND SAID, "THIS IS MY BODY, WHICH IS FOR YOU. DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME."

IN THE SAME WAY, AFTER THE SUPPER HE TOOK THE CUP AND SAID, "THIS CUP IS GOD'S NEW COVENANT, SEALED WITH MY BLOOD. WHENEVER YOU DRINK IT, DO SO IN MEMORY OF ME."

THIS MEANS THAT EVERY TIME YOU EAT THIS BREAD AND DRINK FROM THIS CUP YOU PROCLAIM THE LORD'S DEATH UNTIL HE COMES.

- ◆ He goes on to give strict warnings about people examining their conscience before they eat the bread and drink the wine.
- ◆ he tells them to wait for one another when they eat the Lord's Supper; if they're hungry they should eat at home before they come.
- ◆ and then says, tantalisingly, "As for the other matters, I will settle them when I come."

.....

Invitation to Communion:

Now as we come to share bread and wine together, in an unbroken tradition going back to Christ himself, let us remember both Paul's warnings, and Jesus' gracious words of invitation:

COME TO ME, ALL YOU WHO LABOUR AND ARE HEAVY-LADEN AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST.

I am the bread of life: he who comes to me shall not hunger; she who believes in me shall never thirst.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS, FOR THEY SHALL BE FILLED.

The Saviour invites all who trust him to share in the feast which he has prepared.

.....

HYMN 799:

+ two extra verses

This is the body of Christ,
broken that we may be whole;
this cup, as promised by God,
true to his word, cradles our Lord,
food for the good of the soul.

We are the body of Christ,
separate, yet part of the whole.
Each one, invited by God,
takes his own place, plays, by God's grace,
her indispensable role

These are the body of Christ,
unrecognised though they be.
Each one, beloved by God,
poor, sick or sad, hungry, ill-clad:
"Serve them, and you will serve me"

.....

LET US PRAY:

Lord God, we bring you thanks and praise for all your goodness to your people through the ages, and not least to us, this small company gathered here tonight.

When we were nothing, you made us something.

**WHEN WE HAD NO NAME, AND NO FAITH AND NO FUTURE,
YOU CALLED US YOUR CHILDREN.**

When we had lost our way, or turned away from you,
you did not abandon us.

**WHEN WE WERE READY TO COME BACK TO YOU,
YOUR ARMS WERE OPENED WIDE IN WELCOME.**

And now you have prepared a table for us, offering not just bread and wine, but your very self, so that we might be filled and forgiven; healed and blessed and made new. How, then could we fail to give you all our thanksgiving and praise, joining our voices with those of the whole church in heaven and on earth in the hymn that the angels sing:

(Both): **HOLY, HOLY, HOLY LORD,
GOD OF POWER AND MIGHT.
HEAVEN AND EARTH ARE FULL OF YOUR GLORY,
HOSANNAH IN THE HIGHEST.
BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD;
HOSANNAH IN THE HIGHEST.**

Generous God, as we come to share the richness of your table, we cannot forget the starkness of life in many places in our world. We cannot take bread and forget those who are hungry, for your world is one, and we are stewards of the good things it provides.

LORD, PUT OUR PROSPERITY AT THE SERVICE OF THE POOR

We cannot drink wine, and forget those who are thirsty for peace and for justice. The earth and its weary people cry out for rescue.

**LORD, PUT OUR FULLNESS AT THE SERVICE OF THOSE
WHOSE LIVES ARE EMPTY.**

We cannot hear your words of peace, and forget a world at war. We cannot celebrate the feast of your family, and forget the barriers that still divide your Church.

History and hurt divide us still.

**LORD GOD, AS WE CELEBRATE THIS FEAST OF UNITY,
HEAL ALL OUR BROKEN-NESS AND MAKE US ONE.**

We come empty-handed to your table; our lives a mixture of good intentions and failure to live up to them. We feel unfit to gather

up the crumbs from beneath your table, but with you is mercy, and the power to change us.

So as we do in this place what Jesus did once in an upstairs room, send your Holy Spirit on us, and on these gifts of bread and wine, that they may become for us your body, healing us, forgiving us, making us one. So may we become truly his body, loving and caring in the world until his kingdom comes, that kingdom for whose coming we pray in the words that he himself has taught us:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever. AMEN

.....

Consecration

We do this now in obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ and as a memorial of him who, the night on which he was betrayed, took bread (TAKE), and after he had blessed and given thanks, he broke it and said, "Take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also after supper he took the cup (TAKE) saying, "This cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood. Drink from it all of you."

.....

Sharing of bread and wine

LOOK, THE BODY OF CHRIST IS BROKEN

FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD.

HERE IS OUR LORD COMING TO US

IN BREAD AND WINE.

THE GIFTS OF GOD FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Take, eat, this is the body of Christ which was broken for you;
his blood, which was shed for you.
Do this in remembrance of him.

.....

Peace

**MANY GRAINS WERE GATHERED TO MAKE THIS BREAD;
MANY GRAPES WERE MIXED TO MAKE THIS WINE;
SO WE, WHO ARE MANY, ARE ONE IN CHRIST.
LET US GREET ONE ANOTHER WITH A SIGN OF PEACE.**

.....

LET US PRAY:

God, we thank you for the privilege of having been called into your service. It is a responsibility that terrifies us sometimes, and we feel completely inadequate for the task, and so we thank you that you have given us all that we need to do the work that you have for us to do.

In the Bible - if we read it - is guidance, comfort, challenge and hope. From other people - if we accept it - comes encouragement, wisdom and support. From deep within ourselves - if we are paying attention - comes a knowledge of what is good for us and what is harmful...

And here, at your table, are good gifts that we have all shared: food for the nourishment of body and soul; wine for refreshment and joy. For all your gifts, O God, we thank you, and ask that you may keep us faithful to Christ and joyful in his service. AMEN

.....

HYMN 220: The day you gave us, Lord is ended

.....

Benediction:

=O God, you have let us pass the day in peace;

LET US PASS THE NIGHT IN PEACE.

There is no strength but in you, O Lord

THERE IS NO UNITY BUT IN YOUR HOUSE.

Under your hand we pass the night,

YOU ARE OUR HOME.

Now may the blessing...

Sung Amen

.....