

Having Faith and Being Faithfull

1 Samuel 1:21–28

Dear friends, in the name of Christ, amen!

Our Old Testament reading for today talks about a woman who was depressed and probably having too many voices in her head.

Have you ever had some many voices in your head? People even sing about that, and whatever they sing are an expression of what people are going through.

One of those songs in its not so bad parts, says: “The voices in my head keep telling me I'm insane and maybe I'm a little bit, that won't change Dark clouds, hard times, bad weather Please don't make this last forever...”

There are people who by circumstances keep having whatever voices in their heads. Others by nature overthink things and can't stop thinking about something that gets in the head. Like a car without brakes, just keeps spinning, or going fast and no real way to control, or bringing it to a stop. At times I'm one of those people. If a thought lights up the circuits up here (head) it's hard to bring them to a stop, and sometimes that thought, or thoughts keep me awake all night.... One way I have discovered to stop them, is prayer. Prayer helps indeed!

Such is the case of a woman by the name of Hannah. Hannah is the woman our Old Testament reading talks about. She was the wife of a man from the tribe of Ephraim by the name of Elkanah. Elkanah had two wives, Hannah probably was his first wife, because he loved her very much, but she was barren. The second wife was Peninnah, and she did have children, sons and daughters. Elkanah would take his whole family to yearly pilgrimages and worship at the Temple in Shiloh, but there, at the celebrations sounds like Peninnah would give Hannah a hard time for being barren, to the point that she would fall into depression. As it happens when a person is constantly put down, receiving criticism or told that person is not good enough, it does mess with the mind, the heart, and ultimately with faith. And I'm sure it was not only Peninnah who would give Hannah a bad time, because at that time, people sinfully ostracized married women who were childless, as if they were not favored by God or some other such nonsense. If that wasn't enough, her husband tried to “fix” the problem by

taking a second wife who would give him children. And whenever Hannah would feel depressed, Elkana would make it worse by: “Cheer up, Hannah, am I not worth more to you than ten sons?” (1:8). Well, such is the behavior of those who have no clue at what could possibly be going in another person’s mind.

Now, imagine what Hannah had to face, the humiliation from Peninnah and those around her, the misguided care her husband was providing, and probably her own questions too. What has she done that she is not able to bear children? What is she going to do? Now all those things are the voices she is hearing in her head. And what does she do? She went to the true source of help, God.

And so, at the end of a worship service that Elkana too his family to, Hannah stayed back and went to the altar and prayed. Desperately and tears streaming down her face, she poured out the bitter contents of her soul before the altar of her God. Earlier in the chapter we are told that her prayer was so intense that even though she was praying silently, her lips moved with each new woeful syllable. Her pleading was interrupted by her priest who was there, and thinking that she was drunk, he told her: “How long will you go on being drunk? Put your wine away from you” (1:14).

No one had understood Hannah. Her smile was a fading memory, and at the celebration she refused to eat. She was at her wits end.

It is hard to understand people though, isn’t it. It’s hard even to understand ourselves, let alone others. And no matter how faithful a Christian we can be, we are always being pulled in different directions by an inner struggle others can’t see, just like Hannah’s. She was struggling indeed. Although the Bible doesn’t tell us, it’s not hard to imagine the mess of conflicting emotions pulling at Hannah, and the voices in her head: disappointment, anger, jealousy, a desire for retribution. Whatever she was feeling, Hannah didn’t try to sort through the mess. She dumped the whole pile on God’s doorstep. And as she did, she also made a vow that day, a solemn promise: “O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life” (1:11).

No one understood Hannah, she was depressed, and what could anyone do or say to make her smile return?

Yet her attitude, in seeking help from where true help comes from, is an example of faith and faithfulness. We are at the same time saints and sinners, and because we live in a sinful world, our minds are a battleground of conflicting emotions and desires. Hannah shows us what needs to be done in the midst of these struggles.

What happens in your mind when someone carelessly or deliberately stomps on your foot, or cuts you off in traffic? Jesus says, "Turn the other cheek." But there are other voices inside that want you to scream out in rage or even hurt the one who hurt you. What if this happened on the day you lost your job? What if you knew your husband or wife had been cheating on you? How would you feel and what will you do?

Despite it all, Hannah had faith. She sought comfort from God right there at the Temple, the church. She didn't put on a happy mask to hide her pain, instead she went to worship; she let the tears flow. And when her priest added insult to injury by accusing her of being drunk, she confessed what had caused the tears. When he spoke a word of blessing, she received it as a word from God. She left that day believing the Lord's face was shining on her and that he would be gracious to her. In the midst of her inner battles, she found peace at the Lord's house. The burdens lifted from her shoulders; her smile and her appetite finally returned!

In all these things Hannah is a role model. But the greatest test of her faith was when she kept her vow, she had asked God for a son, and that if she got it, she would dedicate the child to God, and a child she did get. Promises are easy to make but often hard to keep. Despite whatever desires and emotions were pulling her in the other direction, when the time came, she went back to church to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving and with her she brought her son, the son God blessed her with, Samuel. Hard as it was, she kept her vow. She let go of his little hand and trusted the Lord to care for him and protect him and use him for a great purpose.

Hannah is an example of faith and faithfulness. From her story we can learn that when we trust God's promises and manage to do his will even when we're being pulled in different directions by our sinful flesh, we are being faithful in response to God's faithfulness.

But there is more, because what God does with the gift, with the child he provided, Samuel, is not only amazing but has a long reaching, even here today. As you see, Samuel grew to become a faithful priest, a fair judge, and a true prophet who would call people to repentance and faith. And here is the beauty of all, God used Samuel to institute the eternal kingdom of David, through whom God would provide us a Prophet, Priest, and King, Jesus.

There was great need back in those days. Those were dark days, and it seemed they would only get darker. Yet no one was looking to God's law for guidance, even the religious leaders were using their religion for their own purposes, shocking right? Well not so, because just like today, darkness was overcoming. Eli was supposed to be Israel's priest and judge, but he had grown old and lazy. And his sons, who would inherit those roles, were faithless and wicked, they took religion, and their position to get what they wanted.

It was a dark time indeed. But like those candles burning on our altar, there was a flickering light in the heart of Hannah. In faith, she came to God's house and prayed for a son whom she promised to give back to God to become his servant. Her prayer of faith was powerful and effective. God used her faithfulness to provide for all.

Hannah had faith, and she was faithful. But faith doesn't exist by itself; faith always has an object, and it was God. God made a promise. Hannah's faith received that promise, and it guided the way she thought and lived in the world. What God had done for her and all, instilled faith in her, and therefore she was faithful.

And with that faithfulness Hannah took a bull to be slaughtered when she brought her boy to live in God's house. Now, why would she do that? As you see all the blood of all the sacrifices of all the faithful of Israel served a purpose—to remind them of their sinfulness and of the price God would pay to keep his promise.

The act of Hannah giving her little boy to live in God's house, foreshadowed God's action in giving his eternal Son to dwell in human flesh and ultimately be sacrificed for us. He had promised to our first parents that he will provide a son to redeem his lost creatures, and he kept his vow. And when his innocent Lamb of God was slaughtered by sinful men and his precious blood fell on the cursed ground we were redeemed. By his death, the sins of the world are taken away;

by his resurrection, the gates to paradise are open to all who believe. So, no more bulls to be sacrificed. No more animals to be killed in our place. And when you were baptized into the death of Christ, God forgave your sins, covered your sinful flesh with the robe of Christ's righteousness, and lit the spark of faith in your heart. And that faith receives the precious gifts of God. Faith says, "God kept his promise to me. Jesus died and rose for me. The gate to paradise is now open to me." Faith receives the promise from God and guides the way we think and live in the world. God's people have faith, and therefore we are faithful.

God still provides for others through his people. The need is great, even greater today than in Hannah's day. The world is just as dark, but the need is more urgent. We are that much closer to the day of judgment. The world desperately needs people of faith to be faithful.

Therefore, know this, that when we bring our burdens to God's house, when he hear God's word preached to us, when children are brought to be baptized, when parents and sponsors keep their vow to pray for them and raise them in the faith, when we remember our sin and the awful price God paid to forgive us, when our faith is nourished by the fruits of the cross, when we go out into the world and let the light within us shine by turning the other cheek and explaining the hope within us, when we pray for all people according to their needs, when we support the work of the church with our offerings, when we don't favor the powers of world, but submit to God alone, like Hannah, we are being faithful. None of those things will save you or make you worthy to live in God's house—Jesus did that—but God does use them to bless all people through you. When you are faithful, you become one link in a long chain that stretches from the cross to God's eternal paradise.

Being faithful in the world is hard. It's easy for me to say, but it is hard to do. We are saints and sinners at the same time, so our minds are a constant battleground of conflicting desires and emotions, so many voices in our heads—pulling us away from where God leads. It's also expensive. Jesus warned it might cost you everything you love in this world. All of this is true. But faith says, "The need is great! Do it anyway!" It is hard to be faithful, be faithful anyways. Very few worthwhile things are easy do them anyways!

Amen.