

Good morning and welcome to our worship

We've been reading mainly gospel passages recently

Over the next few weeks we will be reading through the first half of the first book of Samuel.

We begin today with chapter 1, the story of Hannah.

(pause)

Let us pray

We gather in the name of Christ, who has revealed his life to us, and called us to follow him,

(pause)

Lord God, we come to meet you in worship knowing that you have already met us.

For we know that, throughout recorded history, you have reached out in love to people and spoken your words to them:

words that have encouraged them, and transformed their lives for ever.

We believe that you continue to meet us today;

come to us in your living Spirit and show us our Saviour, Jesus.

(pause)

We know, Lord, that you called many people to be your servants:

Abraham, told to leave his homeland;

Noah, commanded to build a boat;

Deborah, selected to be your people's judge;

Elijah, Jeremiah and other prophets, charged to speak your words;

Mary, chosen to be Jesus' mother;

Paul, called to be an apostle; and so many more.

(pause)

We know, too, that Jesus called ordinary people to follow him and you have called us not because we're special, but because you love us.

(pause)

We believe that you have given each of us a particular job to do for your kingdom, and special gifts to enable us to do it.

(pause)

Forgive us when we have failed to heed your call Father.

Forgive us when we have been unwilling to use the gifts you have given us in our service of you and the building of your Kingdom,

Holy Spirit of God, we know that you speak to us in many different ways:

Through the words we read in the Bible,

In the preaching that we listen to,

in the wise advice of friends

and, sometimes, when we simply know that you are 'there'.

(pause)

But it is not always easy for us to make out exactly what you are saying Father.

Sometimes we hear many voices and become confused.

Sometimes one loud voice drowns out the quieter words that we are straining to hear.

Sometimes we find it hard to hear you at all.

Give us the ability to know when you are speaking to us Father;

help us to listen carefully and then obey.

(pause)

Thank you, Lord, that we each have a special story to tell.

Some of our stories may be dramatic,
full of encounters with the living God;
others may seem so mundane as to be hardly
worth telling.

Yet these stories are all unique.

Help us to be ready to share them and so pass
on the life of Christ that is within us.

(pause)

In Jesus name we pray who taught us to pray
saying

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 debts as we forgive our
debtors.

And lead us not into temptation.

But deliver us from evil.

For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the
glory forever. **Amen**

Reading - 1 Samuel 1.1-18

There was a man named Elkanah, from the tribe of Ephraim, who lived in the town of Ramah in the hill country of Ephraim. He was the son of Jeroham and grandson of Elihu, and belonged to the family of Tohu, a part of the clan of Zuph. **2** Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah did not. **3** Every year Elkanah went from Ramah to worship and offer sacrifices to the Lord Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the Lord. **4** Each time Elkanah offered his sacrifice, he would give one share of the meat to Peninnah and one share to each of her children. **5** And even though he loved Hannah very much he would give her only one share, because the Lord had kept her from having children. **6** Peninnah, her rival, would torment and humiliate her, because the Lord had kept her childless. **7** This went on year after year; whenever they went to the house of the Lord, Peninnah would upset Hannah so much that she would cry and refuse to eat anything.

8 Her husband Elkanah would ask her, "Hannah, why are you crying? Why won't you eat? Why are you always so sad? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?" **9** 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. **11** 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." **12** Hannah continued to pray to the Lord for a long time, and Eli watched her lips. **13** She was praying silently; her lips were moving, but she made no sound. So Eli thought that she was drunk, **14** and he said to her, "Stop making a drunken show of yourself! Stop your drinking and sober up!" **15** "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. **16** Don't think I am a worthless woman. I have been praying like this because I'm so miserable."

17 "Go in peace," Eli said, "and may the God of Israel give you what you have asked him for." 18 "May you always think kindly of me," she replied. Then she went away, ate some food, and was no longer sad.

Sermon

I wonder if there has ever been anything you are desperate to have.

Something that you believed you so needed that you'd give anything in your life to have it.

That you have prayed to God over and over again for.

Begged God to give you.

Begged God to help you with.

That's what Hannah is doing here.

(pause)

She is desperate to have a baby,

she needs to have a baby.

Without a child her life will have no meaning.

If she doesn't get this baby her life will not be worth living.

(pause)

Some of us may be able to understand her longing.

Her desire,

Her need to have a baby.

We will all have read of the lengths some people will go to have a baby.

The gruelling and expensive IVF treatments that some women have to go through to get pregnant and have their longed for child.

The complications now of eggs taken from one person,

Sperm from an anonymous donor and implanted in a third person, a surrogate.

Great trouble gone to, too produce a child.

(pause)

None of that was available to Hannah.

If she was going to have a baby the only person who could help her was God.

'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.'

(pause)

In this passage we are first introduced to Hannah's husband.

Though Hannah quickly becomes the focus of the story.

And is an important figure in her own right, in the history of Israel.

(pause)

‘There was a man named Elkanah,

from the tribe of Ephraim,

who lived in the town of Ramah in the hill country of Ephraim.’

Don’t hear anything of Elkanah after this story.

No-one talks much about Elkanah.

But Hannah is often talked of.

As the mother of that great figure in the history of Israel,

Samuel.

(pause)

Like in many stories

And as in real life,

The dads don't get much of a look in.

(pause)

Elkanah had two wives,

Hannah and Peninnah.

He must have been well off to have two wives.

Polygamy was legal but not common in Israel

Though again there are other stories of two competing wives in the Old Testament.

Rachel and Leah.

Competing over who could bear the most children to Jacob.

And how important one of those children would be.

Or Sarah and Hagar,

Wife and concubine of the great patriarch Abraham.

Giving birth to competing sons,

Isaac and Ishmael.

In this story we have the two wives Hannah and Peninnah.

Two wives competing over the affection of one husband.

Elkanah may have loved Hannah very much,

Is there a suggestion in the story that he loved her more than Peninnah.

But Peninnah had given him the all important children.

The sons that would carry on his name and look after and support him in his old age.

(pause)

Penninah does not come over as a very nice woman in the story.

They are described as rivals.

‘Peninnah,

her rival,

would torment and humiliate her,

because the Lord had kept her childless.’

The rivalry may have been over who is loved more by Elkanah.

We know he loved Hannah.

No mention of how he felt towards Peninnah.

(pause)

She tormented and humiliated Hannah.

Mocked her because she had no children.

‘because the Lord had kept her childless.’

And that line will sound fairly shocking to us.

Because Hannah had no children it was seen as some kind of punishment from God.

Hannah was not worthy of having children.

Hannah was not good enough to have children.

Or so her fellow wife told her.

Year after year after year this torment went on.

The more children Peninnah had the more judged and condemned Hannah felt.

And was made to feel by Penninah.

‘Peninnah would upset Hannah so much that she would cry and refuse to eat anything.’

(pause)

Elkanah was a sensitive man.

He saw how upset Hannah was getting.

He felt her suffering from not having children.

He tried to console and comfort her because he loved her.

"Hannah, why are you crying?"

Why won't you eat?

Why are you always so sad?

Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

(pause)

Elkanah understood she was upset,

But couldn't really relate to why she got so upset.

Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

(pause)

Is that the number of sons that Peninnah has borne him?

Is that not just a typical mans response?

But I love you surely that's enough.

I treat you well.

Yes you only get one portion of meat from the sacrifice we make at Shiloh.

But Peninnah only gets one share too,

The rest is for her children.

It may look like a huge portion when I hand it over to Peninnah to dole out to the family.

Your portion is tiny in comparison,

But it is the same as what Peninnah gets.

(pause)

Please my beloved you've got to eat.

It's not good for you to deprive yourself like this.

Eating the meat is a celebration.

Is meant to be a fun, happy time.

We've offered a sacrifice to the Lord,

We've repented of our sins and been forgiven
by our beloved Lord.

Now we eat the meat and celebrate.

Come celebrate with us.

Come eat the meat and be joyful.
(pause)

But Hannah couldn't.

She was too sad.

Overwhelmed by grief at her childless state.

Devastated by the fact that she couldn't have
children.

That God,

At least appeared to be,

Deliberately stopping her from having children.
(pause)

Elkanah may have been a caring husband to Hannah but he didn't see what was going on at all.

Didn't see or hear what Peninnah was doing.

Couldn't understand why Hannah could be so upset at not having children of her own.

They had the children by Peninnah didn't they.

Was that not enough.

And Hannah would have been involved in the care and nurture of those children.

It wasn't as if she was being deprived the experience of caring for,

And loving children.

She just wasn't getting to care for and love her own children.

She wasn't getting to care for and love children that she had borne.

She wasn't getting to be pregnant because God was stopping it from happening.

(pause)

The problem can't have been anything to do with Elkanah.

As Peninnah was having no problem getting pregnant.

It was just Hannah that was having the problems.

Just Hannah who is seemingly not loved by the Lord.

Not being blessed by the Lord with children of her own.

(pause)

'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.'

(pause)

She'd had enough.

She couldn't take Peninnah's torments anymore.

She couldn't live with the shame of being punished by God.

She didn't have the strength to keep going.

To pretend that everything was all right.

She was deeply distressed,

'and she cried bitterly as she prayed to the Lord.'

(pause)

Why Lord?

Why are you doing this to me?

Why can't I have children?

What have I done wrong that you are stopping me from having children of my own.

(pause)

Most of us can relate to some of her devastation.

Some may be able to relate better than others.

As a father of four daughters,

I,

Like Elkenah,

don't understand it as well as I should.

Don't empathise as well as I could.

(pause)

Having children was a status symbol.

Just as it is for some people now.

The Duggar family in America - 19 kids and counting.

The Angelina Jolie/Brad Pitt family adopting kids from all over the world.

The babies born to William and Katherine and the focus given to them,

And what they wear and what they do.

(pause)

To not have children meant that people thought there was something badly wrong with you,

That God was stopping you from having children because of your sin.

John the Baptists mum, Elizabeth felt keenly the disgrace of being childless.

When she became pregnant with John she proclaimed –

"Now at last the Lord has helped me," she said.

"He has taken away my public disgrace!" **Luke 1.25**

(pause)

Or in Genesis,

In the story of Rachel,

Like Elizabeth, after she became pregnant and gave birth to a son, she says -

"God has taken away my disgrace by giving me a son." **Genesis 30.23**

Like Elizabeth and Rachel, Hannah felt it badly that she'd not had a child.

Felt it as a disgrace.

And like Elizabeth and Rachel she wanted to be able to say –

"God has taken away my disgrace by giving me a son."

(pause)

Hannah knew that the only person who could help her,

The only person who could do something about it was God Himself.

And so she prayed.

‘she cried bitterly as she prayed to the Lord’

(pause)

She cried - why God?

Why can't I have children like Peninnah?

Why am I being punished?

What have I done wrong?

Why won't you take my disgrace from me?

(pause)

Have we prayed like that to God.

Cried bitter tears as we pleaded with God to help us.

To save us from disgrace.

To rescue us from despair.

‘See my trouble and remember me!

Don't forget me!’

(pause)

In Psalm 6.8 we are told that God will hear us.

The Lord hears my weeping.

He listens to my cry for help and will answer my prayer.

(pause)

Do we pray like that.

Believing that God hears us,

That He will answer our prayers.

(pause)

And then Hannah makes an extreme promise.

One that she may have lived to regret.

'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.'

And we know that that son was Samuel.

And he was handed over to Eli the priest aged between 3 and 5.

After he was weaned.

(They weaned children a lot older than we do in our society now.)

And he was brought up in the temple

only seeing his parents once a year when they came to worship at Shiloh

And brought him new clothes.

'Each year his mother would make a little robe and take it to him when she accompanied her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.'

(pause)

The priest Eli misunderstood what was going on with Hannah at first when she was praying.

He thought she was drunk.

But once he heard her story he prayed a blessing over her.

"Go in peace," Eli said,

"and may the God of Israel give you what you have asked him for."

And we will hear next week how that prayer was answered.

And how she had a child,

The great priest Samuel,

As we read together the rest of chapter 1 and the first 8 verses of chapter 2. **Amen.**

Let us pray.

Father our faith is real.

We do believe.

We do love you

But we know that our love for you is not always seen in how we live our lives.

(pause)

Help us Father to put our faith into practise.

To care for others.

To serve others.

To love others not just ourselves.

(pause)

Father we want to tell others the story of our faith.

But we know our faith needs to be seen in our lives as well as heard by our words.

Give us courage Father to stand up for our faith.

To be willing to be seen as different because we believe in you.

(pause)

Give us the words to say Father as well as the courage to say them.

Give us the opportunities to speak as well as the opportunities to serve and care for others

(pause)

We pray now in the silence of our hearts

Father for the people of our communities who need to hear the good news.

May your Spirit move in their hearts Father.

May they come to know your love and grace.

(pause)

We pray Father for those who have problems getting pregnant like Hannah did.

Who experience the pain and grief of not being able to have children of their own.

Help us do what we can to support them Father.

(pause)

We pray for those of our community who are ill.

May they know the healing touch of your hand in their lives.

(pause)

We pray for those who are lonely, in need of a friend.

May we be that friend **(pause)**

Help us Father to serve you and to build your Kingdom,

In Jesus name we pray. **Amen.**

Benediction

Go into your week with your ears open to the sound of God's voice calling your name.

Go into your week with your eyes open to see the face of Jesus in unexpected places.

Go into your week with your heart open to receive the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Peace.