

10th March, 2024

The paper-version Service

To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If



safe, light a candle and read prayerfully through the service.

If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service.

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Song:

And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me?

'Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies!
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine!
'Tis mercy all! let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.

He left His Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace;
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race;
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;



For, O my God, it found out me.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me!

The Sermon by Val Luca

Read 1 Samuel 2:1-10, Luke 1:46-55 – Finding Joy

Today is Mother's day. If this is a surprise to you, I can assure you that Tesco (other supermarkets are available) still have cards, flowers and chocolates at much inflated prices.

Traditionally Mothering Sunday was not about a person but a place....the church. People returned to the church where they came to faith and were mothered spiritually. Years ago those working in service or on the land were given the day off on the fourth Sunday in lent to return home to their church. Often Sermons today are based on this theme as it safely avoids the emotions Mother's day may bring. These emotions cannot be ignored or brushed away lightly. Naturally the day brings memories of those Mums we loved and mourn. But not all mother-child relationships are loving. Broken relationships, arguments and anger are also brought to mind today. The famous poem by Philip Larkin strongly writes of the effect parents have on us concluding "they fill you with the faults they had and add some more just for you" Today we think and pray of those Mums we know whose children have died before them or have suffered a still born. Women who are childless often avoid this day. Famously, Adam Sandler gives his friend Jennifer Aniston flowers every mother's day to recognize her painful fertility journey. Due to easy travel, the world has shrunk and many children and mothers work and live abroad. In many continents it isn't mother's day, in the USA that's always celebrated on May 12th.

Motherhood is a joy but also a challenge, more so today with the extra pressure of social media. Young parents have child rearing gurus at their constant disposal via google with conflicting advice. Mums certainly need those chocolates today, it is without doubt an exhausting role. How do you torture someone? Hand them an adorable child they love but who doesn't sleep.

Whether you're a Mum, Dad, Aunt, Uncle, teacher, nurse, youth or children's worker we all know the joy and fun children bring. The theme of today is joy and the reading today explores Hannah who experienced desperation, sorrow and conflict. She is a good role model for us to explore today.

Hannah knew sorrow, she was the favourite of Elkhana's two wives. Penninah had lots of babies and constantly provoked and taunted Hannah and her lack of children. Hannah was distraught, belittled and ultimately angry with life. However, she never responded to Penninah with angry words or tittle tattle to her husband. She understood that this behaviour was not the answer instead she took her anguish to the God she loved. Ultimately she became so desperate she prayed and pleaded with God promising that if she had a child she would give it back in service to him. Who hasn't tried to strike a bargain with God when we pray for what we want. For Hannah, her prayer was answered and Samuel was born. Hannah loved her child but when he was weaned she kept her side of the bargain and left him at the temple with Eli the priest. It is suggested that Samuel was 3 years old when he was left. She loved Samuel, what sadness and sorrow it must have been to give up your child.

Surprisingly, today's reading is Hannah's prayer as she leaves Samuel at the tabernacle, and she is full of praise, thankfulness and joy. How can she be so cheerful, it does not read like a mother who will only see her son once a year at the feast of tabernacle. When parents go out for the first time and leave their child with a babysitter, even if it's Grandma they are very anxious. My daughter takes her phone which is linked to the nanny camera placed above the baby's cot. It might be that she

is checking up on my mothering skills! Hannah didn't have the luxury of a Nanny camera. Neither did she have the benefits of social services checking on the suitability of the temple, giving it an outstanding OFSTED rating and making sure Elie had his crib check. How could Hannah be so joyous taking this course of action.

The answer for her joy is very simple. She knows and loves God.

Let's look at some more reasons for Hannah's joy and confidence in God.

Firstly, Hannah recognizes the holiness of God and is in total awe of him. The Hebrew word for holy is to be separate or set apart. He is set apart from us because he is absolutely pure, perfect and everything he says is true and right. She cries, "there is none Holy like the Lord, for there is none beside you". Hannah knew that God was the only one who is absolutely pure, perfect, just, true and always right. The only one who had the power to help. God healed her so she could have children. She finally had her son. God has given us all a son too. His son, given to the virgin Mary. Jesus, who took on the father's likeness and said I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me. There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we can be saved. Holiness came down to earth and like Hannah we too know who we direct our prayers and requests too. Do we know this holiness, do we have the awe and wonder of knowing that Jesus is set apart for us and is true, perfect and trustworthy. If we do, then we too know something of Hannah's joy.

Secondly, Hannah joyfully cries there is no rock like our God. He is solid, strong, steadfast, not easily moved or shattered. Psalm 18 proclaims the Lord is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the power that saves me and a place of safety. These characteristics of God will never change, Malachi 3.6 I am the Lord, I do not change. Whatever the circumstances God cannot change therefore he cannot stop being God. We know that God is love, he loves us unconditionally, we cannot earn it and it's a love that endures forever. Whatever happens God will keep on loving us. He is permanent, God is always there. Hannah knew this and wherever her and Samuel went he would continue to love them. Her confidence in God's love knew no bounds. God would look after Samuel and no harm would come to him, he would be protected. God was her rock. Leaving Samuel in the Temple was the safest place for him to be. Do we share Hannah's confidence in God's love? God loves us so much and as Christians we know this because he so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. The sacrifice of Jesus is the evidence of this love. God's love is the basis of Hannah's joy and ours too. Joy is constant and unchanging because we are loved unconditionally.

Thirdly Hannah joyfully praises that all the earth is the Lord's, he has set it in order. As creator of the universe God is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent. Unlike us, God's knowledge is not limited as he made everything and understands everything. Even if we have high IQ's and think we are intelligent Hannah warns us not to boast, it's arrogant to think that we could understand and know. Psalm 139 sums this up "such knowledge is wonderful for me, too great for me to understand". I remember once talking to a senior oncologist, a very clever Christian man and him humbly saying that what he knew about his subject could be written on the back of a postage stamp,

there is just so much more to know and understand. It is the overwhelming sense of God's knowledge and wisdom that Hannah understood. She understood that she couldn't understand it. Instead of being afraid she trusted the plans for her and Samuel's life. For I know the plans I have for you declares the lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Hannah gave birth to three sons and two daughters.

Finally he's a God of justice, those who oppose the Lord will be broken, the most high will thunder from heaven, the Lord will judge the end of the earth. It's suggested that Hannah was thinking of Penninah here, the other wife who made and was probably still making her life a misery. I'm sure we can empathize with Hannah the desire for the wicked to be silenced in a place of darkness. We can probably think of a few people ourselves we'd like this to happen too. But Hannah was confident that the faithful will be protected, but the wicked will disappear on the day of judgement. Like Hannah we too can have this confidence that God will sort things out for us. We do not have to take the law into our own hands. Hannah didn't take revenge, she left everything to God. Romans 12 writes, "Do not take revenge, leave room for God's wrath". As Christians we are also assured on the day of judgment, Jesus will appear for us, "whoever hears my word and believes him who sent has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. The Lord has everything under control, ultimately the victory will be his. We can worry about wars, dictators even death itself, but we have been given victory through Jesus Christ. We do not need to worry, this is why Hannah was able to leave Samuel at the temple. We have a just God. Hannah's joy was not because she was given Samuel but because she knew the Lord. She really knew and understood his holiness, his love, his knowledge and his justice. She trusted him completely with her life, no matter what happened. Hannah is encouraging us all to know this joy for ourselves.

God's grace is sufficient for whatever we need. Pray like Hannah, never cease praying and always choose joy. As Nehemiah 8 writes, "the joy of the Lord is my strength".

Both Hannah and Nehemiah can't be wrong.

May you have a joyful Mother's Day.

The Lord's Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.*

The Notices: We are now holding services in the building on Sundays at 8am and 9.30am, and are live streaming the 9.30 service. This Paper Service will continue for the moment and is generally available the week after the service.

- Tea and Chat and Bowls: March 20th at 2pm
- Coffee and Questions: March 27th at 10.30am in Church Hall.
- Tea and Praise: Sunday March 24th at 3.00pm.