

Howrah Sandford Weekly Church Bulletin

2nd August 2020

SUNDAY SERVICES at St Thomas's Howrah 8.30 and 10 am (both Holy Communion) and St Barnabas's South Arm 10 am (Holy Communion and baptism)

There is also weekly online worship found on the home page of www.stthomashowrah.com

READINGS:

1 Samuel 2:1-10 Luke 1:39-45 Luke 1:46-55

LEONIE'S SERMON: Finding Joy in Any Season (Hannah's Joy)

Today we are looking at Samuel's mum Hannah and we hear her prayer, her song of joy. It had been a tough time for Hannah living in a society that portrayed childlessness as a failure as a woman. It had been a tough time for God's people, without effective leadership, hit rock bottom morally, ethically, and spiritually. The chapter before was the concluding chapter of the Book of Judges which ends 'In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit' Jud 21:25. That is no exaggeration because it chronicled alarming accounts of gang rape, civil war, mass slaughter of entire tribes and cities, and kidnapping.

Can you imagine living at a time when those around you worshipped other gods and the fertility gods like Baal; blaming your sinful life as the reason you weren't able to conceive a child! Hannah's husband Elkanah took a second wife who duly bore him children to perpetuate his family line, but his first and greatest love was for Hannah. No matter how much he tried to console her, Elkanah could not fulfil what she longed for more than anything. What made matters worse was that Elkanah's second wife Peninnah, kept provoking her in order to irritate her. It all came to a head on the annual family trip to Shiloh, the home of the ark of the covenant. It was supposed to be a feast, a celebration, but for Hannah it was torture. The taunts of Peninnah became too much for her to bear. In desperation, she got up from the meal, and went to pray.

As Hannah pours out her heart to God, she vows that if He would give her a son, she would give him back to Him, to live in the temple and to serve Him. In due course Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son, whom she named Samuel. True to her promise, after she had weaned Samuel, she took him to Eli, saying, 'This is the son I prayed for. God gave him to me and now I am giving him back to God. Please take care of him and train him for God's work.' As she hands over her child, Hannah, overcome by emotion cannot contain her elation and breaks out in a song of joy. Today's song is Hannah's testimony. This beautiful, anointed prayer is her story.

Her first words are clear "My heart rejoices in the LORD'. Why would Hannah rejoice when she has given up her long-awaited child? You may well ask! A glimpse into the answer is that it was the custom to offer a gift to the Deity when a prayer was answered. Her happiness is that in a time when she was scorned as a woman not conceiving, she had regained her honour. She then goes on to say 'in the LORD my horn is lifted high'. The horn of an ox depicts military strength. In the ancient New East powerful warrior kings would sometimes compare themselves to a goring bull using its horns to kill its enemies. Perhaps Hannah views herself as the victor in her struggle with Peninnah.

She then bursts forth in verse 2 singing. "There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no rock like our God.' In Canaanite culture, 'Holy Lord' meant the assembly of other gods, called 'sons of the Holy One', like the fertility god Baal. We hear Hannah rejecting this belief, telling it as it is as she affirms the majesty of one true God.

I wonder who you look to for strength, as a refuge or safety net when life becomes a struggle (perhaps your family or close friends). Hannah is affirming there is no safer place than in the hands of God. That He is the giver and taker of life⁶. He sends both poverty and wealth⁷. He is the one who drags us down when we are arrogant and gives us strength when we are at our low points in life. In verse 8 we read 'For the foundations of the earth are the Lords: on them he has set the world'!

THINGS TO PONDER:

1. Hannah knew the **character of God**, who He was, and His great love and compassion. She knew where to take her problems – straight to God in prayer. Unlike Jacob and Paul we heard about last week, Hannah in her

personal crisis was able to sing for joy, knowing that it was the Lord who answered her cries for a child. Today's text does not promise that God will give children to a childless couple if they just pray hard enough or promise they will dedicate the child to his service. Hannah experiences her answer to prayer in a particular way that is relevant to her situation. Think about your life – how have you experienced God's love and compassion in a way that fits your life story? How has He answered your prayers? Do your prayers reflect confidence in the God you know?

2. **Samuel needed to be born at a crucial time in history.** God's purposes were far greater than granting Hannah her desire for a baby. He had a plan that needed Samuel at the right place, at the right time. So you see: a woman gains a son, a nation gains a leader and ultimately, as an even bigger story is told, the world gains a Saviour.
3. Consider the **power of testimonies.** Hannah's testimony in song has been preserved in the Bible to show us what unwavering trust and faith looks like. When God does something good in your life, why not share it. Let God use your testimony to encourage others.

FOR YOUR PRAYERS:

- This week let's pray for the central part of our parish: **Clarendon Vale, Rokeby and Oakdowns.** For the students, staff and families of Rokeby and Clarendon Vale Primary Schools, Bayview Secondary College, Emmanuel Christian School, John Paul II Catholic Primary School. For the ministry of school chaplains including Vic Panne. For Mission Australia Housing, Rokeby. For the clergy and people of Grace Church Rokeby.
- For Wesley Bird being baptised today at St Barnabas', for parents Natalie and Gary and for godparents Sheralee, Michael and Felicity.
- For the continuing process of appointing a new Rector.
- For a new Treasurer and for Parish Councillors and Wardens to serve on the new Parish Council with the new Rector.

FROM THE MINISTER:

- The registration website for this year's **Bishop's Training Event** now open at www.bishopstrainingevent.com Due to COVID, this year it is a fully online event, from 10am-1pm, Saturday 19 September. Online means that anyone in Tasmania with internet can watch it with no travel! You are encouraged to organise some watch parties with others in your church as well to get some interaction. The list of speakers and workshop presenters is fantastic! More great interstate presenters than we could usually have in person.
- For your diary: **Parish Annual Meeting** Sunday 23rd August at 11 am at St Thomas's preceded by one service only at 9.30 am and a cuppa. Easy lunch at 12. Sign up this week at church for the **parish electoral roll** and permission to have your contact details in the **parish directory.** Nomination forms for **wardens and parish councillors** are available.
- **We are looking for a New Treasurer.** Serve in a vital role for the ministry and mission of your church. Talk to me, the Wardens Hilary, Barry, Neil or our Acting Treasurer Kate if you are interested or want to know more.

With the love of Jesus
Andrew Lake

0487903363
minister@stthomashowrah.com