

**The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**I Samuel 1: 4-20**  
**Hebrews 10: 11-18**  
**Mark 13: 1-8**

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When I prepare to preach I like to find threads between the lessons, threads which make their way into our everyday lives. I like to find the images and words that fit into something I recognize in my life, or in our common life here at the Church of the Resurrection. Sometimes its easier than at other times. When I prepare to preach, I live in hope that it will all come together in some meaningful way for all of us, or some of us, or at least for one of us!

Today's lessons seem to me to be about huge obstacles: obstacles which seem immovable to us, those obstacles can be found both within us and in the world in which we live. Today's lessons are about feeling powerless in the face of those obstacles, and grasping hope that those obstacles are NOT obstacles to God's love and mercy.

Hannah was feeling particularly powerless. As a woman of her time, her identity was completely wrapped up in her production of children, and she was barren. Her husband tried to console her in her grief. Her husband was no help – his comment was basically, why are you crying for a child, you've got me, don't you? Aren't I better than ten sons?

Her only hope, her only confidence was that God would listen to her. Her only hope was that God would act in her life. That God would do something new in her life.

Hers is a story of a woman wanting to matter. She lived in a chaotic time of the life of Israel . The institution of the church was falling apart --- Israel was between the time of judges and the time of Kings. Her story of God's intervention was one which gave confidence to those who would listen, that God would make things right. That God was doing something new. When Hannah's child was born, it was a sign of hope that God was indeed still active and creative in the life of God's people.

She made her way to the temple to ask for God's mercy, and ask for the gift of a child, to ask for meaning and purpose in her life. That Eli, the priest, thought she was drunk was really an indication that the institution didn't recognize that one could come before God with an expectation of being heard. Her willingness to go beyond expectation, and go directly to God is a model for us, in our distress.

Hannah is for us a model of hope in times of barrenness, and confidence in times of chaos. Hannah is a model for us – living in hope and confidence even when all around us would tell us that we are powerless.

In today's gospel, the disciples and Jesus were taken by the huge stones which made up the temple. Their comment about how big those stones were led Jesus to tell them that even they wouldn't last forever. Even they were vulnerable. They couldn't be trusted to stand against outside forces. The temple and its massive stones would crumble.

Jesus was talking to people who lived in times which were about to change for the worse. Mark, who wrote those words hoped that those he spoke to could better face their present challenges. But in the midst of the talk about things we can do nothing about, Jesus assures us that God and God's words stand alone as our source of hope.

When they felt powerless, they still had a thread of hope in the history of God acting in the lives of God's people – in leading them to freedom after 400 years of being enslaved, in providing for them food and water in the desert, in the birth of a child after years of barrenness, and even though the stones of the temple were toppled, no one could take that hope and God's promise of salvation from them.

There are of course plenty of things in our future that we can and will worry about. Plenty of things that can and will be obstacles to that hope. Our worries range from keeping our jobs and health insurance, to holding our marriages together, from threats of wider armed conflict in the world to divisions in our churches and our families. Natural and fiscal disasters. There is plenty to be distressed about – from within and from without. But we have God's gift of hope. Hannah and her child stand as a witness, one of many from the bible and from those who live among us, as witness to that kind of hope .

God's hope is a great gift in our lives, and something entirely different than just believing that things might turn out OK. In today's gospel Jesus acknowledged that times were bad and that for some, times were going to get worse. And the writer of that gospel wanted readers to know that their fear needn't consume them. No matter what happened, or didn't happen, God's love would remain constant.

And God's love remains constant in our lives. Of all the worries in our lives, we DON'T have to worry whether or not God loves us. We don't have to worry that what we might do or not do will keep God from loving us. Because we have what the book of Hebrews calls the full assurance of faith, assurance that we have forgiveness and always have God's love. Jesus, the perfect model of living in hope has gone before us, has claimed salvation for us and assures that we are home, always, in God's loving arms.

Jesus doesn't shrink from the hard stuff. Not from talking about it or confronting difficult people or situations. And we can't avoid the hard stuff either. But Jesus moved with confidence that these obstacles from without don't need to be matched by barriers of fear and powerlessness from within. And that God's goodness and mercy was deeper than his greatest fear, just as God's mercy was more fertile than Hannah's barrenness.

The book of Hebrews reminds us as Christians to keep getting together as we do each week. When we gather each Sunday, and together confess our sins and we remind each other hear once again the assurance that forgiveness is ours through Jesus Christ's life and death. When we gather each Sunday and hear those stories which tie together the threads of mercy and hope from people past to the lives we are living, we remind each other of God's boundless love,. Together we work to maintain that gift of Christian hope, which is almost impossible to maintain alone. Along with the gift of hope, we have been given in this community a gift of fellow Christian hoppers.

Each day we awake, we awake love. We awake forgiven. Each Sunday when we gather we remind each other of the love God shares with us and between us . Beside the many things we have to be grateful for as we approach Thanksgiving, our homes, cars that run, an abundance of food and freedom, let us remember to thank God for the gifts of assurance, and hope and each other; our fellow hoppers.