

Pentecost 25, 15.11.2015, Holy Trinity

1 Samuel 1:4-20, Mark 13:1-11

How often have you read something in the Scriptures, whether Old or New Testament, and thought that very little has changed in some areas of the world and society?

It happens to me quite often.

To-day's readings, for example, bring us face to face with some of life's struggles, with choices and prophecies.

The story of Hannah in the first reading resonates with many women in our own time.

Infertility is a challenge that many women face in to-day's world.

There are, however, some differences in the two situations.

In Hannah's day failure to conceive was understood as a sign of punishment or God's displeasure.

On the other hand, to-day's woman who wants to conceive and is unable to do so has a number of options open to them.

In some cases, however, the stigma remains the same for some women to-day as it was for Hannah.

What, then, do we see in Hannah and her character?

There is her faithfulness to God, her highly emotional prayer and persistency, her resilience and her ability to manage her life in the midst of peer pressure.

There is also her selfless act of handing her son literally over to God as she had promised at the time of her emotional prayer.

This is a reminder for us and the world at large that all things on earth and in heaven are God's gift to us.

They belong to God and we are God's stewards to care for all things, great and small.

Hannah provides a model for us to live faithfully in times when things are going wrong and we feel that God has forsaken us, whether on a personal level, a community, national or world-wide level.

When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, according to Mark's Gospel as read this morning, he went into the temple and he and the disciples looked around.

The temple was a magnificent building and Jesus predicted its destruction.

Indeed, it was destroyed in 70 AD.

In conversation with the disciples, Jesus points to the reality of the crumbling world situation at the time.

Jesus likened the world situation to birth pangs which offer hope and the emergence of new life to the pregnant mother.

Mark takes us into the brutality of war that would be part of the experience of many, the rape and pillaging, the burning and torture, the killing and mutilation, nations rising up against nations, kingdom against kingdom, along with earthquakes and famines.

In addition, Mark has Jesus speaking of trial and betrayal, of persecution and false teachers.

And yet, defiant hope remains: "the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations."

If we relate this to our present world we have the brutality of war, the killing and mutilation and the aftermath of the suffering in body, mind and soul of those returning, the destruction of sacred places and buildings along with earthquakes and other disasters and we discover that over time not a lot has changed.

Are these the birth pangs from which comes hope and new life?

Does this give the church at large and in our midst the opportunity for a radical rethink in the way in which we engage in the mission of God in the communities in which we have our buildings and other infrastructure?

Is this a further call to community and service?

I am sure that this parish is already doing much to establish community around our buildings and to be of service to those around us.

But can we, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and with constant prayer, worship and living the life that God wants us to live, come together in serious conversation groups to look for new ways in which the good news can be proclaimed in our midst?

It is in buildings like this and in many other places within the parish in which the Eucharist is celebrated that our spiritual life is formed and continues to be formed from which we are sent out into the world to actively and deliberately bear witness to God's faithfulness, love, acceptance and forgiveness.

If we are fearful of the challenge given to us at the end of every Eucharist, we will retreat into what we know and fail to walk outside to bring reconciliation into this troubled world.

Now is the time for Christians throughout the world to unite with peoples of other religions, to speak against false teachers and together leap out in faith and hope to help bring peace and reconciliation to our troubled world.

Which is it going to be for us in this parish? Is it fear or leaping out in faith and hope?