

14 November 2021

1 Samuel 1.4-20

⁴ Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. ⁵ But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the Lord had closed her womb.

⁶ Because the Lord had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. ⁷ This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the Lord, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat.

⁸ Her husband Elkanah would say to her, 'Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?'

⁹ Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the Lord's house.

¹⁰ In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. ¹¹ And she made a vow, saying, 'Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.'

¹² As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. ¹³ Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk ¹⁴ and said to her, 'How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine.'

¹⁵ 'Not so, my lord,' Hannah replied, 'I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. ¹⁶ Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.'

¹⁷ Eli answered, 'Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.' ¹⁸ She said, 'May your servant find favour in your eyes.' Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

¹⁹ Early the next morning they arose and worshipped before the Lord and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her. ²⁰ So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, 'Because I asked the Lord for him.'

Song of Hannah *1 Samuel 2.1-8*

My heart exults in the Lord: my strength is exalted in my God.

My mouth derides my enemies: because I rejoice in your salvation.

There is no Holy One like you, O Lord: nor any Rock like you, our God.

For you are a God of knowledge: and by you our actions are weighed.

The bows of the mighty are broken: but the feeble gird on strength.

Those who were full now search for bread: but those who were hungry are well fed.

The barren woman has borne sevenfold: but she who has many children is forlorn.

Both the poor and the rich are of your making: you bring low and you also exalt.

You raise up the poor from the dust: and lift the needy from the ash heap.

You make them sit with the rulers: and inherit a place of honour.

For the pillars of the earth are yours: and on them you have set the world.

Hebrews 10.11-14, 10.19-25

¹¹ Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. ¹⁴ For by one sacrifice he has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy.

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Mark 13.1-11

¹ As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, 'Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!'

² 'Do you see all these great buildings?' replied Jesus. 'Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.'

³ As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴ 'Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?'

⁵ Jesus said to them : 'Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁶ Many will come in my name, claiming, "I am he," and will deceive many. ⁷ When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁸ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth-pains.

⁹ 'You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. ¹⁰ And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. ¹¹ Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

Sentence

The Lord will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king, and exalt the power of his anointed. 1 Samuel 2.10

Prayer of the Day

O God,
welcoming refuge for the outcast,
and upholder of justice for the oppressed:
maintain the hope of the poor,
so that the time may soon come
when no one need want for food and shelter,
and all will learn to share freely
following the example of your Son, who gave his very self;
who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.



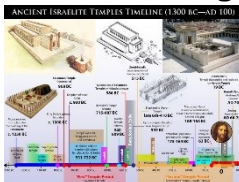
In Biblical times life was a little more basic, many things which we would consider to be private were semi-public. Nowadays, those of us who have had babies know about childbirth. Some of us have attended a birth but many of us only know about it from movies or TV. In ancient times siblings would be dropping in and out during the labour, neighbours came to help and even if you weren't in the room, you could hear. Everyone knew that labour was a long, hard process so when the prophets predicted that God's kingdom would be like a birth, people understood it's going to be long and hard, but it will be worthwhile. The Jews had long since abandoned the idea that they would win their rightful place as the chosen people on earth by human means, but they were confident that God would directly intervene and win it for them. This was called 'the day of the Lord' and they expected that leading up to this event would be a time of terror and trouble as the world would be shaken to its foundations.



In the time between the two testaments the Jews were constantly overrun by one conqueror or another, they had not known freedom for hundreds of years. In that time a kind of popular religious literature grew up. These were dreams and visions of what would happen when the day of the Lord came and just before, they were called Apocalypses. All the Jews knew these visions.

In our passage today, Jesus is talking about the future, what he is saying is about things that will happen in their lifetimes, and he describes these events as 'the beginning of birth-pains'. What he means is this is the beginning, there is more difficult times to come, "the day of the Lord" is not going to happen immediately but it's a beginning.

A bit of background: Solomon built the first temple in about 957 BCE and it was



destroyed by the Babylonians in 597 BCE but in 538 BCE the Persian King sent the Jews back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple which was finished in 515 BCE. You can read that story in the book of Ezra. Various conquerors desecrated and

plundered the temple over the next few hundred years until in 20 BCE King Herod started rebuilding, this lasted for 46 years. It was aimed to curry favour with the Jews and was in fact a total reconstruction and he made it much bigger and better than it had ever been but because the Jews didn't like King Herod, they always insisted it was still the second temple.

As the disciples come out of the temple, following the incident of the widow's mite, which was last week's reading, the disciples are admiring the work.

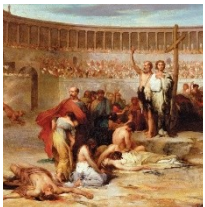


The temple was impressive, made of huge stones and covered with gold, considered the most building on earth at the time. No wonder the disciples were impressed but Jesus solemnly predicts that the whole thing will be demolished causing the sacrificial system to be abolished

which it was in 70 AD.

Some people have taken this chapter to be about the end of the world, but it is mostly about the lives of the disciples. Many of them will still be alive when the temple is destroyed and will remember this prediction and that is their expectation, so they naturally ask him about it.

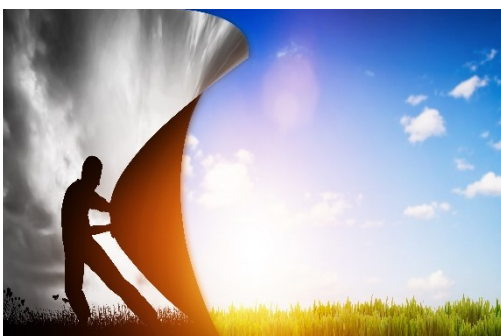
Jesus reply is a series of warnings, their lives will often be very difficult, and they will hear of all sorts of things happening, but they need to realise that these things happen, they are not necessarily a sign of the end times, and they can trust God through it all and he will bring them through.



All those things did happen in the short term, there have always been people who have claimed to be Jesus or speaking for Jesus, and this started very soon after Jesus ascended to heaven. It does seem to be part of the nature of mankind that there is always a war somewhere; earthquakes and famines occur

reasonably frequently somewhere in the world and within a generation Nero had picked Christians as his perfect scapegoat and they were persecuted intensely.

These things happened to the disciples but also continue today. There have been so many false prophets who have somehow extracted from scripture, or their unique communication with God, predictions that the world would end on a certain date and taken in many gullible souls. We still experience wars, earthquakes, and famines and in some countries, Christians are still persecuted. Christians who don't face persecution often face the opposite temptation, to become stagnate, to become cynical and suppose that nothing is happening.



It is so easy to say that everything is dreadful now, that young people don't respect their elders, that people have abandoned the church, the old days were wonderful, but people have been saying that since time immortal and it is not in itself a sign that the world is going to end. The church will change, society constantly changes, but our Lord is still

God, and he will revive his church and do something totally new in his own good time.



Two of our readings today centre on Hannah, Hannah's problem was that she was not able to get pregnant, IVF and even adoption were not really options, a very personal problem, nothing compared to persecution, wars famine and the end of the world. Our God cares about all the problems big and small.

For Hannah it was big enough, a woman's whole status in society depended on her ability to produce heirs and Elkanah's other wife made sure to rub it in at every opportunity so much so that she was too upset to eat. Despite her husband's love her whole life centred about her lack of a son so while in Jerusalem she went to the temple to pray. Despite his initial misreading of the situation Eli the priest blessed her, and she felt her prayer had been answered

The passage we read instead of a Psalm is her song of praise when her son was born. As she had promised he was dedicated to the Lord and lived in the temple from age 3 and grew up to be the great prophet, Solomon.



Eli was a human priest, and he did all his priestly duties day after day and this line of priest continued until the temple was destroyed, with each priest continuing on with their sacrifices for themselves and the people. The priests who continued the work after Jesus had died did not realise that their work had been done for all time and

now Jesus was sitting with His Father in heaven having reconciled the whole world.

This makes all the difference to our lives as Christians: We don't know when Jesus will return, but we know that he will return one day and we live our lives in anticipation of that even but in the meantime because Christ died, we can enter the place where God dwells, speak to him in person. We can draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.



We hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And we can consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as we look forward to the magnificent and uncompromising day of the Lord.