



MOTHER'S DAY AND PENTECOST

LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

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Lection - 1 Samuel 1 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 1) There was a certain man of Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham son of Elihu son of Tohu son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. (v. 2) He had two wives; the name of one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

(v. 3) Now this man used to go up year by year from his town to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the LORD. (v. 4) On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; (v. 5) but to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb. (v. 6) Her rival used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. (v. 7) So it went on year after year; as often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. (v. 8) Her husband Elkanah said to her, 'Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?'

(v. 9) After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the LORD. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. (v. 10) She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD, and wept bitterly. (v. 11) She made this vow: ‘O LORD of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head.’

(v. 12) As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. (v. 13) Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk. (v. 14) So Eli said to her, ‘How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine.’ (v. 15) But Hannah answered, ‘No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD. (v. 16) Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time.’ (v. 17) Then Eli answered, ‘Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him.’ (v. 18) And she said, ‘Let your servant find favour in your sight.’ Then the woman went to her quarters, ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer.

(v. 19) They rose early in the morning and worshipped before the LORD; then they went back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. (v. 20) In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, ‘I have asked him of the LORD.’ (v. 21) The man Elkanah and all his household went up to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice, and to pay his vow. (v. 22) But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, ‘As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, that he may appear in the presence of the LORD, and remain there for ever; I will offer him as a nazirite for all time.’ (v. 23) Her husband Elkanah said to her, ‘Do what seems best to you, wait until you have weaned him; only—may the LORD establish his word.’ So the woman remained and nursed her son, until she weaned him. (v. 24) When she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine. She brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh; and the child was young. (v. 25) Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. (v. 26) And she said, ‘Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the LORD. (v. 27) For this child I prayed; and the LORD has granted me the petition that I made to him. (v. 28) Therefore I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives, he is given to the LORD.’ She left him there for the LORD.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

Mother’s Day, an international celebration, focuses on honoring the lives, sacrifices and love of mothers. In the United States, in 1907 Anna Jarvis on the anniversary of her mother’s death, called for the establishment of a national Mother’s Day in honor of her mother (also named Anna) who had organized women to provide aid to soldiers in the Civil War and for other social activism actions. White carnations were given to all the mothers in the daughter’s West Virginia home church. Woodrow Wilson signed a resolution in 1914 establishing Mothers Day as a day to honor women as mothers rather than peace or social activists as Jarvis had intended. See the cultural resource unit for Mother’s Day for additional historical information

African American Christians annually recognize Mother’s Day as a liturgical event. Red carnations signifying living mothers and white carnations signifying deceased mothers, special recognition of youngest or oldest mother, mother whose child was most recently born, and mothers who have contributed significantly to the life of the church or community are incorporated into worship services.

II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: 1 Samuel 1

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Part One: The Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter

As an African American daughter, mother, grandmother, great grandmother, and African Methodist preacher, Mother's Day is significant from the point of view of a recipient of honor and one who honors all women present during worship. I realize that some are overjoyed during the special day, surrounded by children and grandchildren who may attend church only on Mothers' Day. Some are mourning the death of their mothers all over again, painfully pinning on a white flower. Some are in pain due to poor or nonexistent relationships with their birth mothers. Some have not given birth to children but have mentored others. Some have lost their children to death, war or the justice system. Regardless of what the Hallmark or Mahogany cards say, African American mothers are not one size fits all. Not every woman is a long suffering, sacrifice everything, hot homemade cookies when you come home from school, solve all your problems, always loaning money, smiling through every crisis, sitting through court, early for visiting day at prison, never raise her voice, or the next best thing to God type of mother. Some are able to balance everything without any complaints. Others are doing the best they can with the resources they have. Still others opt out of their responsibilities. At the end of the day African American mothers are human beings acting as surrogates for God's children.

Part Two: Biblical Commentary

1 Samuel 1 context of scripture: 1 Samuel 1 is replete with crisis and transformation. Israel is facing a potential Philistine conquest while there is no king on the Hebrew throne. The religious center of the nation is led by a faithless father and sons team. The nation is moving from diasporic tribe centered rule to a centralized government. The story of Samuel's birth parallels the labor, birth and dedication of Israel under Samuels's judgeship and David's reign through Yahweh.

1 Samuel 1 - Verses 1-5 Family Drama: The text depicts two families in crisis. Hophni and Phinehas, sons of Eli the priest at Shiloh, are corrupt. They ignore their priestly responsibilities seeking personal gain. Their father Eli, who would never receive a medal as father of the year, has placed the ark of the covenant at risk due to his negligence. The second family is headed by Elkanah the Levite, native of Bethlehem, who evidently is a man of means and position. He has two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. They reside in Ramah, and by law the head of the household was required to make an annual sacrificial trip to Shiloh, probably for Passover. Hannah was barren, the ultimate humiliation of a woman in ancient times. By rights Elkanah could have divorced her because of her physical inability to produce a male heir. There was a law against polygamy (Deuteronomy 17:17), but he may have taken a second wife to insure heirs. Hannah's infertility was attributed to God's will (v. 6). During the family meal Elkanah gave each person a serving of food representing a peace offering, but gave Hannah a double portion. This may be indicative of his affection for her, or her status as first wife.

1 Samuel 1 - Verses 6-8 Sister Stuff: Hannah was privileged in Elkanah's heart, but the other wife constantly signified that Hannah was barren. According to the text, Peninnah was quite fertile having produced sons and daughters. The taunting probably increased with the birth of each child, and Elkanah's subsequent thanksgiving sacrifice for each child as they went to the temple at Shiloh. These sisters had to share a home, attend public and religious functions together, and share a man's love. The fact that Elkanah apparently favored the childless Hannah over the child-bearing Peninnah had to add fuel to the fire of challenges faced by Hannah. Note that it is not recorded that Hannah retaliated. 1 Samuel 1:7 indicates that the tempestuous relationship existed for years with Hannah depressed, crying and probably with health problems due to the stated loss of appetite. Elkanah's concern expressed in 1 Samuel 1:8 is an odd mixture of what is wrong with you, and being married to me should be enough. Perhaps he is unable to understand that in their culture her entire personhood, her womanhood, is directly related to her ability to have a child. She is not only considered, as women were in that era, lower than the animals and other

property her husband owned, or the sons he had, but she was not viewed as a real woman outside her home.

1 Samuel 1 - Verses 9-18 Hannah's Conversations before and with God: Hannah has three speeches in these verses

(1) A plea to God wrapped in a complaint that she is childless (vv. 9-12)

Hannah promises God that if she has a son she will give him back to God as a Nazarite. Nazarites were consecrated to God and vowed to: 1) abstain from wine and strong drink, (2) refrain from cutting hair off the head during the period of the vow, and (3) avoid contact with the dead. (Numbers 6:1-21)

(2) A correction of Eli that she is not drunk.

Eli watched her crying and silently praying. He charged that she was drunk and was making a public fool of herself. (vv. 12-16) Hannah responded that she was pouring out her soul to God.

(3) An assurance that God does not lie.

Eli assured her that God had heard her prayer and sent her home. She returned to her quarters, ate and was at peace.

1 Samuel 1 - Verses 19-28 Giving Back to God: Returning to Ramah, Elkanah and Hannah conceived a son. Women at that time had authority to name children and she gave her son the name, Samuel, "because she asked El for him." During the time of pilgrimage to Shiloh, Hannah remained at home until Samuel was weaned informing her husband she would make a sacrifice to God at another time (vv.21-23). At the proper time Hannah took Samuel to Shiloh. She presented God with a sacrifice of a three year old bull, a meal offering, and drink offering. She reminded Eli who she was, and left Samuel with him as she had promised God. This mother's sacrifice was the son she prayed for in faith. Her actions are ultimately the prelude to a change in leadership for Israel. Samuel would become a prophet, judge and king maker. What a great sacrifice from a great mother.

Celebration

This year Mother's Day coincides with the celebration of Pentecost. The birth of the church in the Upper Room is a replication of child birth. There was a conception through the death and resurrection of Jesus, a period of gestation-waiting for the impregnation by the Holy Spirit, and a spark of life when the one hundred-twenty persons in the Upper Room were unified through language, thoughts and faith. Hannah waited in faith for the deliverance of a child. Samuel would ultimately be the spark to lead Israel to the next level. In both cases, God rewarded faithfulness and obedience. In both stories, the move of God was mistaken as public drunkenness. The joy in both cases is that regardless of what others think, God moves in mysterious ways birthing new miracles every day.

Descriptive Details

The descriptive details of this passage include:

Sounds: Hateful challenges from Peninnah (vv. 6-7), hushed tones of Hannah's conversation with Eli (vv. 14-18), childbirth screams and a baby crying (v. 20), worship chanting, music (v. 19);

Sights: Gold and brass temple implements and furnishings, dust formed on roads by pilgrims from around the area going up to temple (v. 3);

Smells: The blood of sacrifices, musty smells in the temple (vv. 3, 25) food and drink (vv. 5, 9, 18);

Tastes: The unleavened bread, fruits, vegetables, wine (vv. 5, 9); and

Textures: The coarse hair on the bull (v. 24).

Enhance the Sermonic Moment

- Redefine, or refine, maternal characteristics in order for ordinary everyday mothers to feel valued instead of less than if they are not the stellar biblical characters about which preachers usually preach.