

New Kilpatrick

Sermon

16th October 2016

Spirit... hold us in the hope of the gospel... fashion in us the longing of the kingdom... and dare us to find voice to speak words of light in all the shadows... Hears us and inspire us... So be it... Amen...

Someone said to me this week... we've only got four weeks of the US election to go... Four weeks still seems an awfully long time to go...

I'm completely confused with this election... I don't quite understand what is really happening... What is going on?... There are those who have stood back from Donald Trump's comments... and his schoolboy denials... but still intend to support him... How people believed that everyone would see through him... but he is still polling far too high to suggest that if that is true... then it doesn't make a blind bid of difference... Excluding Michelle Obama's remarkable and honest speech about sexual assault on Thursday... there has been precious little for the US to be proud about... and we should, know after our EU referendum... only the US election seems to be going on years longer... From this side of the Atlantic... it feels more like reality TV gone mad...

It's like the judges last Sunday on Strictly... complaining about those who were in the dance-off... because they were far better dances than others the public had saved... forgetting that Strictly isn't a talent show... it is entertainment... and those who entertain most... stay longest... and the truth is quality doesn't entertain... it is people making fools of themselves in a dance show or an election that does...

How many will we see really pulling back from supporting Trump... because the people who do *not* fall into the routine... of always doing what the social conventions tell them to do... or do not follow the formally sanctioned patterns of behaviour... are the ones who tend to make a moral difference... There are just fewer of them...

I would dare any prospective leader... and I include our own leaders... and equally... I'd dare myself... and all of us... to find a new role model... that might take us out the patterns and social conventions... we are all used to...

And here... Hannah becomes a candidate... a barren woman... loved by her husband... indeed is his favourite... a man who is gentle with her and despite the conventions of the day... does not blame her for being childless... He too might be a good example of a decent model for some... but Elkanah is not the one we talk of today...

He takes Hannah and his other wife Peninnah... to the temple at Shiloh... for the annual offering... and Elkanah... like a good Hebrew... follows all the rituals and customs... worshipping God as he has been told to... by the conventions of the day...

But all around him... is the obvious corruption of the temple... the priests take the offerings from themselves... they are drunk daily... abuse of their position... and women... Elkanah keeps his head down... makes the required pilgrimages... pays his respects... brings his sacrifices... and leaves... These are dark days... He does as is expected of him... a model citizen of a corrupt empire...

Meanwhile... Hannah... our alternative role model... doesn't... The way she prays... puts her in opposition... to all that is happening...

She *doesn't* pray the way she has been taught... and she *doesn't* ask for what she is *meant* to ask for... The barren one... the silenced one... makes a prayer that would shake the temple walls fall if they weren't already in ruins... and would have shocked Old Eli the priest's sensibilities... if he wasn't so drunk to have been unable to hear it...

She disconnects herself from the powers that be... from the corruption... the falseness... the mud slinging as it were... from those that control her relationship with God... the language she should use... the position she should take... and prays by a different vision...

Hannah has just handed over her son to this temple system... and goes on immediately to pray for the displacement of the powerful who made it such...

Don't dare talk pretentiously—

not a word of boasting, ever!

For God knows what's going on.

He takes the measure of everything that happens.

The weapons of the strong are smashed to pieces,
while the weak are infused with fresh strength.
The well-fed are out begging in the streets for crusts,
while the hungry are getting second helpings.
The barren woman has a houseful of children,
while the mother of many is bereft.

Our role model's prayer... is a plea for the downfall of the "high and mighty"... and for the raising up of the "poor" and the "wretched"... This is not a song of motherhood... this is a prayer for revolution...

But what is interesting about this story... and many more like it... is that it is in the Bible... but perhaps more so... it is part of our formal Sunday readings... This prayer... these words... are officially sanctioned by the church to be read in our communities... These words of Hannah's have been licensed for use in our worship...

So by reading it... we are formally endorsing... Hannah's intent... Hannah's vision... Hannah's decision... to stand in opposition to the tacit licensing of power that has become corrupt... misogynistic... selfish...

Perhaps this is the gospel for what is happening so obviously in the US elections at the moment... but also in so many other places too... but less obviously... it seems Hannah speaks into what is loudly condemned but quietly condoned... where too many simply follow what becomes a convention despite its hurt... immorality... dulling of life...

But let's not imagine it's all about them... them being anyone but us... It is our lesson too... The church... has sanctioned Hannah's words to be read... the intent... to rebalance the world... and by having us communally read it... has called us to behave in a way that makes possible this vision of God...

When Pinochet was dictator in Chile... he banned the reading of these words... He was frightened that it may make people revolt... so it was against the law... for these to be read in churches...

So the mothers and wives of the disappeared... the women of those who had been killed by the state... would stand in town squares... and point to the government buildings... and whisper... these words... so those in their plush offices could not hear... but the women heard... God heard... the town heard... the song of revolution... that Hannah... their role model... sang... words that puts truth into lies... rebalance into imbalance... and redemption into immorality...

I remember in South Africa... taking part in a protest with a friend who invited me along... I didn't know how it was going to go... but people sang... and the songs that brought people together... were not folk songs... or political ditties... but faith songs... songs such as Hannah's...

Our bible... has created the soundtrack... of people's freedom... In a different generation it was the soundtrack to their apartheid imprisonment... but now people had refused to comply with the corruption of the temple... and tacit acceptance of what had become locker room banter...

The lesson perhaps is for us to be a faith community... that responds to what social conventions say we should do... by offering words... that speak in opposition to that which tacitly creates fear... limits people's lives... corrupts our relationships with men and women... and creates a greater and greater gap between us...

For James' sake... may we make Hannah our role model... to shed our tenuous connection with power... and to *have* voice... and *give* voice... to those on the wrong side of what sports as entertainment today...

Hannah invests hope through her son... by moving against what is corrupt... and growing more in tune... not to the reign of the locker room... but to the reign of God...

References

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