

Faithful Women: 1 Samuel 1:1-28 and Luke 21:1-4

Norwalk Christian Church, May 10, 2015, Easter 5, Year B Mother's Day

I do want to wish you all a Happy Mother's Day. Whether you admit to it or not, each of you are quite good at mothering us along, from how to pick out the proper winter coat, to determining what is a weed and what is intentional, I/we appreciate you and we thank you.

I find Mother's Day to be one of the hardest Sundays for a church to prepare for. My number one rule for what a church should be is a safe place, meaning, it's a place where everyone feels safe. Where there is no judgment, no stress, no worry. A place where love is lavished on everyone. A place where you feel belonging. A place you know, without any doubt, is safe. So on Mother's Day, when we gather as a whole, it's hard for me to make sure everyone feels love, everyone knows they are worthy just as they are, they are needed, and they belong. I know some will feel pain today, but I want them to experience our love surrounding them. I hope our responsive reading today aided in throwing comfort and lavishing love all over you today.

It comes as no surprise to us, that long before there was ever a holiday known as Mother's Day, women were still feeling the pressure of inadequacy, of failure, for not birthing a child. In our first text today, we encounter two women. Two women who are married to the same man. Monogamy was not established as the only acceptable practice in their society, so it's not as Jerry Springer as it first sounds. In fact many biblical figures had multiple wives (including Abraham, Jacob, and David). Wives, in their society, were valued when they bore children. Children carried on the family legacy, the family traditions, they tended the family land. If your wife didn't bear children, you took a second wife. We've seen this in Genesis with Sarah & Hagar, and Rachel & Leah. Yet this tidbit of information not only tells us about the culture and time this story took place, but it's setting the stage for what we're about to hear.

Not to our surprise, as we finish verse 2, we learn Elkanah's second wife, Peninnah, is described as having children, while his first wife, Hannah, is described as having none. Are you starting to sense the dynamic of this family? Peninnah, the second wife, whom Elkanah never refers to as the one he loves, is listed first for bearing children, while Hannah, the wife Elkanah loved, is listed last. If that isn't enough, scroll down to verse 6, maybe it can paint a clearer picture for us of the dynamics. "Her RIVAL (interesting choice of words) used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb." Are you sensing some of the family drama now? We have a man married to two women in a society that only values wives IF they bear children. Peninnah, for lack of a better word, is emotionally abusing Hannah, who is probably already abusing herself. We, humankind, do a smashing job of beating ourselves up and heaping unnecessary things upon our already fragile selves. I imagine Hannah being a lot like most of us today. We look at this verse, God had closed her womb. And translate it as if God had said, you aren't good enough. And for Hannah

we've discovered that both lover and provoker treat her that same way, as God-forsaken.

Elkanah is a religious man. He traveled each year to participate in a time for family worship & sacrifice to the Lord of hosts. This is a particular childless burden for Hannah. In addition to daily reminders that the children in the house were not of her womb, each year during this trip of sacrifice and praise, Peninnah would provoke her. Hannah would weep and would not eat. Year after year, Hannah would weep at this event.

Some women today would say that there are things their spouses just don't understand. After reading verse 8, where it reads [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?"]], it's clear that Elkanah doesn't get it. He doesn't understand her pain. He has kids. He's not looked at as God forsaken. And his value isn't based upon this one thing. While he may mean well, he places himself, not Hannah as the center focus. He does not tell Hannah that she is worth more to him than ten sons, but that he is suppose to mean more to her.

As we move on into verse 9 we're presented with the heart of our story. The narrative moves from what happens year after year to the events of a particular year when Hannah left the sacrificial meal and "presented herself before the Lord." She makes a vow to the same Lord of hosts Elkanah makes sacrifices to each year. And Hannah vows if she is given a male child he will be a nazirite, one who is separated from the others by abstaining from alcohol and cutting their hair. And while Nazirite vows were not typically lifelong vows, Hannah, just like in the story of Samson, vows a lifelong commitment.

While pouring her heart out to God, and making these drastic promises, Eli, the priest at Shiloh, mistakes her for being drunk. Here, in the middle of the day, this woman is on the floor, glassed over eyes from crying so hard, her mouth is moving like she's talking to herself. Eli has probably seen a lot while working as a priest. When he sees Hannah, he assumes she's gotten drunk and found herself in a public space, where she's humiliating herself. Of course, she isn't there to look pretty and her heart is so true in her cries that literally her only reason for being there is to petition and cry out to God. When she explains herself, he tells her to go in peace, the God of Israel will grant the petition you have made to him.

Let's skip over to our second scripture. While it's much shorter in length, it has some of the same characteristics as our first text.

Luke 21:1-4, He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have

contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.’

Now this passage about a widow is mentioned immediately after “the scribes devour widow’s houses” in the previous verse, it raises the question, does Jesus praise the widow for her generosity or lament that in giving all she had she has become a victim of the temple system? The scribes take even the widow’s houses, but the widows give even their last two lepta to the Lord. The widow gives with complete devotion and selflessness. This widow like Hannah, and all those who mother us in our lives, know what faith is all about. People like Jordan Butler and Katie Randolph come every JYF afternoon, faithfully, to simply spend time and love on and mother our children. Peg Johnson and Dawn Mundil, come every Dinky afternoon, faithfully, to spend time loving on our children. Every Wednesday night Amy Lester is here, engaging with our teens and making sure they know she loves and cares about them. One bad experience or rough week at any of these events is not going to stop these faithful women from coming back. They care too much and love too deeply. They understand that working with people, regardless of age, is hard work. But someone spent time with them, to shape them into being the people they are today. And each of them are giving back in their own way now, loving and shaping and mothering, nurturing and caring for others, so they can grow and learn and know they are loved.

In this passage this poor widow has put in more than all of them. All of them gave “out of their abundance” but she “out of her poverty”. Even on days when we feel we have nothing left to give. Our energy is zapped. Our tempers lack patience. And nothing we’ve done so far has seemed to work the way we thought it would, the kids, the teens don’t care. They don’t seem to mind at all. For they are safe, they are loved.

Today is Mother’s Day. A day we celebrate and thank the women who have shaped and formed our lives. The faithful women that help us become better people. Today I encourage you to thank all the women that have helped shape and form you. The faithful mother-ers, who hold a dear place in our hearts for their patience, love, and steadfast faith, we honor and celebrate them. May we be good stewards faithfully investing in God through the lives around us. Happy Mother’s Day to you all!