

Sermon for Family Service: Pott Shrigley 14th March, 2021.

Mothering Sunday.

Rev David Swales

1 Samuel 1:20-28 Hannah and her son. 1100 B.C.

How different do you think life will be in 100 years? It's hard even to imagine how much things on earth will have changed by then, isn't it? Travel, technology, politics, the environmentA bit scary, too, maybe.

Well, OK, what about 500 years? Whoah! Would we even recognise the world in 500 years?

Then - what about 1000? Well, now you are really messing with my mind, Rev David!

Well, today we heard about a woman named Hannah, who had recently had a baby boy. And, when this took place, Jesus' time on earth was still over 1000 years in the future!!! I just wanted to remind you of what a long, long time ago it was when our story took place. A totally, totally different world from ours, you might think. But, as so often with the Bible, we find when we read it that the people, and the things that really matter to them, are not so very different from the way we are today.

1st of all, Hannah had been very sad because she had no children. That can be a sadness for some people today – and on Mothering Sunday, we remember them alongside those who are mothers. And, of course, although Hannah had been sad when she had no children (especially because the people around her made her feel bad about it), many of the most famous people from the Bible were not parents – fathers or mothers. And yet they were able to do great things for God, things which they might not have been able to do if they had had children. God used them to bring his blessings into the world in so many different ways.

Although we celebrate mothers today, let's also celebrate those whom God uses in wonderful ways without them being mothers, or fathers!

But in our story we see something else which is just the same now as it was then. We see Hannah full of thankfulness and joy following the birth of her child – something for which she had waited for so long. Just like many parents today, she recognises that this child is a gift from a kind and generous God. And she wants to find a way to say Thank you. They had a way of saying thanks back then which looks a bit strange to us:

...taking along a three-year-old bull, ten kilogrammes of flour, and a leather bag full of wine, she took her child, young as he was, to the house of the LORD at Shiloh...

- she made a sacrifice at the place of worship.

Still, today, parents have exactly the same thankfulness at the gift of a child. And, if they are aware of God and his love, they often want to find a way to say Thank you – perhaps in a church service, or with prayers of blessing and thanksgiving. Like Hannah, they may even want to give something tangible to God; not as if they could pay him back, but as a way of saying thank you – and maybe as a way of sharing their blessing with others. I wonder if you can think of any ideas of how we could do that in our day? Maybe a gift to a charity which helps other children, or which helps parents who struggle to give all the good things we are able to give to ours?

There's one more thing which we today can learn from Hannah, a mother from so very long ago. She prayed for her child, and her prayer was that he would be faithful to God as he grew. Yes, parents today, as always, want the best for their children in other ways – they want them to do well at school, to have lots of skills, talents and abilities, to be healthy and well, to grow up and be successful in whatever path they choose, to have good friends.....But what Hannah prayed for most of all was that her son would be a faithful servant of God.

Hannah said to Eli, "Excuse me, sir. Do you remember me? I am the woman you saw standing here, praying to the LORD. I asked him for this child, and he gave me what I asked for. So I am dedicating him to the LORD. As long as he lives, he will belong to the LORD."

Hannah did her best to give her son that relationship with the Lord. She did it by bringing him, when he was older, to serve God in his special place of worship – his

shrine (this was hundreds of years before Solomon built the Temple). The boy actually came to live in the shrine, and worked with Eli, the old priest, whom we also met in our story.

Now, I don't think today's parents should leave their children to live here in church and help me! But they *can* bring them into God's presence – through praying with them at home, through guiding them in their faith as they grow, and of course through making sure that they are part of a church family, such as the one we have here at Pott Shrigley, including having them baptised into that family. Sometimes parents say to me that 'they will let their children decide on what to believe when they get older'. Well....yes, of course: faith has to be a personal decision. But you will influence them by your guidance right from the very beginning – and if you don't tell them about God and his love, you are influencing them to think that God doesn't matter. Knowing God is the best gift any mother or father can give their child: and Hannah made sure she gave this to her son. And sure enough, a few years later, we read of her son hearing the voice of God speaking to him for the first time – in the middle of the night.

As a parent, it is great to see your children grow up and develop into adult life – and, hopefully, into an adult faith in Christ. I don't know to what age Hannah saw her son grow, but I rather hope that she lived long enough to see that he became a person who is still remembered and revered for his service of the Lord 3000 years later – he became the prophet Samuel, who led and guided his nation through difficult times; he was God's voice to the nation, declaring God's words to them – even when they didn't want to hear them – and even was involved in choosing and anointing Israel's first King, Saul; and then its greatest King, David.

Let's thank God for all mothers – and especially for those who, like Hannah, guide their children in the ways of the Lord.