

Sunday, November 14, 2021 – Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost

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Introduction

November begins with All Saints Day and ends in or near Advent, when we anticipate Christ's coming again. It is fitting, then, that the readings today tell of the final resurrection and the end time. In the turmoil of hope, fear, and disbelief that these predictions provoke in us, Hebrews sounds a note of confident trust. Christ makes a way for us where there is no way, and we walk it confidently, our hearts and bodies washed in baptismal water, trusting the one who has promised forgiveness. The more we see the last day approaching, the more important it is to meet together to provoke one another to love.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, your sovereign purpose brings salvation to birth. Give us faith to be steadfast amid the tumults of this world, trusting that your kingdom comes and your will is done through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading: 1 Samuel 1:4-20

This story introduces us to Elkanah, a devout Israelite, and his wife, Hannah, who is unable to have children. God grants Hannah's prayer and she bears a son, Samuel, who will be an important figure in Israel's history. Samuel, the last of Israel's judges, anoints the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David.

⁴On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; ⁵but to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb. ⁶Her rival used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. ⁷So it went on year by 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. ⁸Her 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?"

⁹After 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. ¹⁰She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD, and wept bitterly. ¹¹She 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."

¹²As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. ¹³Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk. ¹⁴So Eli said to her, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine." ¹⁵But 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. ¹⁶Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time.” ¹⁷Then Eli answered, “Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him.” ¹⁸And she said, “Let your servant find favor in your sight.” Then the woman went to her quarters, ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer.

¹⁹They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD; then they went back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. ²⁰In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, “I have asked him of the LORD.”

Psalm-reading 1 Samuel 2:1-10

¹My heart exults in the LORD; my strength is exalted | in my God.

My mouth derides my enemies, because I re- | jice in my victory.

²**There is no Holy One like the LORD, no | one besides you;**
there is no Rock | like our God.

³Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come | from your mouth;
for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by the LORD ac- | tions are weighed.

⁴**The bows of the might- | y are broken,**
but the feeble | gird on strength.

⁵Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are | fat with spoil.

The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children | is forlorn.

⁶**The LORD kills and | brings to life;**
the LORD brings down to Sheol and | raises up.

⁷The LORD makes poor | and makes rich;
brings low, and al- | so exalts.

⁸**The LORD raises up the poor from the dust; lifting the needy from the ash heap, to**
make them sit with princes and inherit a | seat of honor.

For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and on them God has | set the world.

⁹You, LORD, will guard the feet of your | faithful ones,
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness; for not by might does | one prevail.

¹⁰**The LORD's adversaries shall be shattered; the Most High will thun- | der in heaven.**
O LORD, you will judge the ends of the earth; you will give strength to your king,
and exalt the power of | your anointed.

Second Reading: Hebrews 10:11-14 [15-18] 19-25

Images of worship and sacrifice are used throughout Hebrews to highlight what Christ has uniquely accomplished through his death. Because we have received forgiveness through Christ's death, we live with sincere hearts by trusting in God's promises and encouraging love and good works from each other.

¹¹Every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. ¹²But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, "he sat down at the right hand of God," ¹³and since then has been waiting "until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet." ¹⁴For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. [¹⁵And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying,

¹⁶"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord:
I will put my laws in their hearts,
and I will write them on their minds,"

¹⁷he also adds,

"I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."

¹⁸Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.]

¹⁹Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Gospel Reading: Mark 13:1-8

In the last week of his life, Jesus warned his disciples concerning trials that were to come upon them and upon the world. He exhorts the listener: Do not be alarmed.

¹As [Jesus] came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” ²Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”

³When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴“Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” ⁵Then Jesus began to say to them, “Beware that no one leads you astray. ⁶Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. ⁷When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. ⁸For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.”

Prayers of Intercession

Eternal God, you hold firm amid the changes of this world. Hear us now as we pray for the church, the world, and everyone in need, saying “God, in your mercy” and responding, “hear our prayer.”

A brief silence.

God our creator, you show us the path of life. Bless faithful people everywhere with humility as they extend compassion to those who have experienced harm in religious spaces. Cultivate healthy congregations that tell of and enact your reconciling love. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God our constant, you love our universe from beginning to end. As the seasons change, protect animals that migrate and hibernate. Bring them safely to a sheltered place and a more abundant season. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God our ruler, you write your law on human minds and hearts. Give wisdom to all elected leaders and officials to govern with insight and compassion. Make them mindful of the well-being of all people so that your world will flourish. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God our stronghold, you are present amid disaster. We pray for those affected by natural disasters (*recent natural disasters may be named*). Come to the aid of all survivors of earthquakes, famines, floods, hurricanes, and wildfires, and the first responders who support them. Calm their fear, supply their need, and be the solid ground beneath their feet. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God our guide, you are greater than we can imagine. Surround congregations with your expansive inclusion. Be present in the midst of disagreements, differences, and questions. Unite people of diverse viewpoints in the love of Christ. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God our beginning and our end, your beloved people shine like the brightness of the sky. We thank you for the lives of all who rest in your eternal mercy, from famous saints to the people we have loved. Assure us of your resurrection promise. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God our hope and strength, we entrust to you all for whom we pray. Remain with us always, through Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

A reflection for the Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost...

Real Strength in Community of Faith

What makes something strong? Is steel strong because of its ability to withstand stress from many directions? Is wood strong because of its ability to absorb impact while remaining intact? Is the material of a spider's web strong because of its tensile strength-to-weight ratio? Things are strong for many reasons. The temple in Jerusalem was thought to be stronger and more permanent than anything, yet Jesus says in Mark, "Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down" (Mark 13:2). Jesus shows hearers that true strength is not built upon the oppression of widows (Mark 12:41-44).

Many of the world's most prized structures are built on the shoulders of the poor and oppressed. How many homes in poorer areas of cities have been destroyed by the need for a new or wider highway? How many workers living in poverty died building the Golden Gate or Brooklyn Bridges, the Hoover Dam or the Empire State Building? In order for human beings to build structures of great strength, they must rely on sacrifice and compromise. Can any human standard of strength be achieved without making something else weak?

Real strength, however, is not shown in things built by human hands. Real strength is found in the hands themselves. True strength is shown in workers reporting to work day after day in impossible conditions because it's the only way to feed their family. It is shown by an entire community of God's people linking their trembling hands as they share the "confession of our hope without wavering" (Heb. 10:23). The new, true temple, Jesus' faithful strength, succumbs in weakness to human-made nails. While the nails lie rusting away, the wounded hands and body rise again to break bread with all on the journey down the path of life.

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