

Sermon for Sunday 17 November 2024@ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: 1 Samuel 1:4-20; Psalter 2:1-10; Hebrews 2:11-25; Mark 13:1-8

Sermon

As it does for us regular church-goers, the church starts a new discussion today.

Last Sunday ended in silence, as far as the sermon went. Of course, being a United Methodist preacher, after a pause, I kept going a little during the Quaker silence I closed with after announcing we Americans had elected a new President; but it was a clear point made. We were up against a new dimension, a new reality, that needed to be brought into the room if we were seriously talking to and listening to God.

Just like, "My husband just died," or "My daughter had a baby;" or, as William L. Shirer announced over the short-wave when I was a five-year-old, "Great Britain went to war today," after a due silence to sink in, the Bible took over with one of its assigned stories, and we were given something besides current events to reflect upon.

Today the news may be full of politics, or whatever personal circumstances are closing in on you or me, but we've got a fresh situation to study and let God tell us about.

Israel is headed for monarchy. The period of the judges is drawing to an end. God has seen that they're not into following him/her whole-heartedly, and if we keep paying attention for a minute or two, or a few Sundays, we'll hear him give us a king and all that means like we've just been reminded, we have, we are, a governed society.

Listen today to how it starts. Think about this passionate, aggrieved, spiritual woman, Hannah, and what it meant to be unable to deliver. Listen to her desperate prayer. Follow on, and when she gets pregnant, think about what it means to say you got your child, and then you gave him up as soon as he was weaned, like you promised ... maybe in those times, that meant when he was three or four years old ... and turned him over to an old man and his servants to raise in God's special house ...

Think about the song Hannah sang, and how Christians have always said the young girl Mary patterned her Magnificat after it when the angel announced that she, unwed, engaged but not impregnated in our terms of thinking, would have a child..

It's enough to get us off brooding about politics, or turning away from them entirely, as we have this week. This is a big story, and we'll be coming back to it the rest of our lives of faith.

Use it, and the psalm the church has selected to go with it this Sunday, and the reading in the Letter to the Hebrews we are about to finish, with all its detailed insistence Christians use to lift up Jesus above all the other Bible characters ... Reflect on these things, now and this coming

week ... Let your mind and heart focus some time each day on this story and not just on your story just now, ... and close with the whammer in the Gospel lesson, when Jesus predicts not a stone will be left standing of the temple the disciples are admiring...

...and let that be the sum of all the news, and all the not-news, you got from going to church this week-end.

Whatever we think is going on; whether we listen to the news or religiously turn away from it, day after day, remember the preacher said big changes are ahead in the world. Things can't stay the way they are much longer, in God's time. Whether it's global warming Didn't I hear this is the hottest year on record? ... or enough of the powerful justice-seeking community on this globe comes together against Israel, or ... you name it ... Jesus is saying what we set up, what we count on as a human race, is change-prone and you'd best not forget it ... that's the news for prayer this Sunday.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, tell us. Tell us again. What we count on isn't what matters. We do not have control of matter or mind, much less of nature or human arrangements. It is time to recognize that and pray about it and do what feels right to us individually, and when we feel led, to do together, to head in a new direction. Shake us up enough to think about it, at least a little every day. Where are we headed? What am I doing? How do I hear YOUR word to us, to me, to the whole human race, and all its friends and companions in the animal world, the bird world, the tiny creatures and the ocean dwellers and everything. Let us listen to your story again, and hear more of its truth. This is your kingdom. It's coming. It's here. We can get on board. We can change, and cooperate, and grow better ... and you will help make it more beautiful than we can dream ... because you love us, and will help us love you.

We pray through Jesus' power to change and keep us, always. Amen.