

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

November 15, 2015
Proper 18B/Ordinary 23B/Pentecost 15

The readings this week:

• 1 Samuel 1:4-20 • Psalm 16
• Hebrews 10:11-14 (15-18), 19-25 • Mark 13:1-8

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Pouring Out Our Souls

Twice in the Bible people who are praying are mistaken for being drunk. Hannah on the threshold of the Temple of Shiloh is praying for a son and is castigated by Eli. "Put away your wine," he says. On the day of Pentecost the apostles are filled with the power of the holy spirit, and they begin to speak in many languages. Those around them marvel that at 9 o'clock in the morning they are already sloshed.

But, no, they are praying.

It does make you wonder what that kind of prayer looks like...was Hannah sitting there with a copy of The Book of Common Prayer opened up? Were the apostles singing polyphonic chant in many languages?

Down cast eyes? Solemn faces? Lips pursed?

I don't know about you, but my mental images of prayer don't conjure up anything that even remotely resembles drunkenness. Nor do my mental images of public drunkenness resemble something that looks like prayer.

But, my guess is that the problem here isn't my understanding of drunkenness, but rather prayer.

We too often make prayer to be something that is dour and zapped of power and thrill. Ask someone to offer the prayer before a meal, and all of a sudden the room gets quiet, people who are laughing and talking are shot looks that could kill, and out-of-the-blue people start talking in broken Elizabethan English.

Gaylord Focker's prayer isn't hilarious because it's outlandish, but because it strikes a chord. We make prayer out to be something that's awkward and forced. Somber and lifeless.

But, not Hannah.

Hannah is praying for a child. She's praying from the very depths of her longing. Standing there only steps away from the Ark of the Covenant was no time for thee's and thou's. No time for stilted awkwardness, and fake formality.

"And we thank you oh, sweet, sweet Lord of hosts for the...smorgasbord you have so aptly lain at our table this day, each day. Day by day, by day..."
Yeesh.

No, she was pouring out her very soul. Her heart. She was communicating to a God she knew and loved. And, she was bearing a heavy burden, and she was unloading that burden on her Lord.

And, you know what? When you communicate with someone that you know and love, you do so with exuberance and passion. Pet names and knowing glances. With tears of joy and tears of loss.

Given the right circumstances, sometimes you might even look drunk.

Because a the relationship that we're offered with God is a real one. A genuine relationship. The God who made the heavens and the earth wants to know us, and wants us to know him. And when we're excited we're to gush out like Hannah breaking out into song. And when things are falling apart, we're to gush out like Hannah at Shiloh.

In short: lose the grim and stilted faces. Find ways for your posture of prayer to look more like a party in which God was invited.

~ Rick Morley, [a garden path](#)



Reflecting on the Word



___ 1st Reading: [1 Samuel 1:4-20](#)

What cherished hope do you increasingly fear may never be realized in your life? Why is Hannah's pain so intense? Hannah turns to God in desperation. What does her prayer reveal about her? What does Hannah believe about God? If you were describing Hannah to a friend, what would you say about her? About her gifts? About her spiritual life? When you are bitter about your disappointments, to whom (or what) do you turn? What specific things can you learn from Hannah about the solution to the pain of unfulfilled hopes? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

___ Psalm Reading: [Psalm 16](#)

In what areas of your life do you struggle for balance? According to this passage, what has the Lord done for David? What body imagery does David use to describe his relationship with God? Describe the spirit of David's comments about the land in verses 5-6. What is the significance of the Lord's being at David's right hand? Look back through the entire passage. What is important to people who follow God? How do those values contrast with worldly values? In what specific ways do you need to bring your values in line with God's values? What would help you to do that? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)



*Whatever is foreseen in joy
Must be lived out from day to day.
Vision held open in the dark
By our ten thousand days of work.
Harvest will fill the barn; for that
The hand must ache, the face must sweat.*

*And yet no leaf or grain is filled
By work of ours; the field is tilled
And left to grace. That we may reap,
Great work is done while we're asleep.*

*When we work well, a Sabbath mood
Rests on our day, and finds it good.*

*X by Wendell Berry from A Timbered Choir.
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___ 3rd Reading: [Hebrews 10:11-14 \(15-18\), 19-25](#)

Recall an opportunity you missed because it sounded too good. What did you miss by not believing the evidence? The writer continues to discuss Jesus and the Old Testament offerings. How do verses 1-4 prove that the Old Testament system was a shadow, not the real thing? As you meditate on verses 11-18 and the awesome love and power of Jesus to take away your sins, what are the responses in your heart and mind? In light of what God has done for us in Christ, what three commands does the writer feel compelled to issue? How can you help hold someone you know "unswervingly" to faith? What purposes could be achieved in your life by both this strong encouragement and this stern warning? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

___ 4th Reading: [Mark 13:1-8](#)

What are the ways some predict the end of the world will happen? What response do you have when you hear those predictions? Do you wish you knew the end of the world would be? How should a Christian view the end of the world compared to those who do not yet know Christ? Why did Jesus turn a discussion about the temple into one about the end of the age? Why did the disciples want to know more? What signs did Jesus give? Have those signs already happened? Jesus was very vague with his response, how do you make sense of his answer? Why were the disciples so proud of the structure of the temple? How might they have felt when Jesus said it will be destroyed? Of all the things you value, which ones are permanent? Which ones are temporary? What happens if we place our trust in the things that are temporary? Why do we think those temporary things will never come to an end? How is an experience with God something permanent? How does this passage and discussion help us to approach the future without fear? [Faith Element](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

*A prayer for life to fill the void
(inspired by Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2)*

*A prayer that reverberates throughout time
for a child
for a partner
for a friend*

*A prayer that is at once lost
and found*

*A grief exposed for the healing balm
A prayer that grows in the crevice of despair
pushing past the boundaries
bursting forth in new life*

A prayer for life to fill the void

~ Katherine Hawker, [Liturgies Outside](#)