

Divergence on the Lectionary - Proper 28 B (track one)

First Reading

1 Samuel 1:4-20 (vv. 1-3 and 21-28 included in italics)

There was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephrathite. He had two wives. The name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other, Peninnah. And Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the LORD.

On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb. And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. So 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. And Elkanah, her husband, said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?"

After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly. And she vowed a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head."

As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli took her to be a drunken woman. And Eli said to her, "How long will you go on being drunk? Put your wine away from you." But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation." Then Eli answered, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him." And she said, "Let your servant find favor in your eyes." Then the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.

They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD; then they went back to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, "I have asked for him from the LORD."

The man Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and to pay his vow. But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, so that he may appear in the presence of the LORD and dwell there forever." Elkanah her husband said to her, "Do what seems best to you; wait until you have weaned him; only, may the LORD establish his word." So the woman remained and nursed her son until she weaned him. And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and she brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh. And the child was young. Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. And she said, "Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the LORD. For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the LORD. As long as he lives, he is lent to the LORD."

And he worshiped the LORD there.

Psalm - 1 Samuel 2:1-10

In place of a psalm, our lectionary gives us Hannah's song, which is really important from a New Testament perspective, so although I don't usually include the psalm for study, I did here, as an extension of the OT reading.

And Hannah prayed and said,

"My heart exults in the LORD;
my horn is exalted in the LORD.
My mouth derides my enemies,
because I rejoice in your salvation.

"There is none holy like the LORD:
for there is none besides you;
there is no rock like our God.
Talk no more so very proudly,
let not arrogance come from your mouth;
for the LORD is a God of knowledge,

and by him actions are weighed.
The bows of the mighty are broken,
but the feeble bind on strength.
Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,
but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger.
The barren has borne seven,
but she who has many children is forlorn.
The LORD kills and brings to life;
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.
The LORD makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low and he exalts.
He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts 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 he has set the world.

“He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness,
for not by might shall a man prevail.
The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces;
against them he will thunder in heaven.
The LORD will judge the ends of the earth;
he will give strength to his king
and exalt the horn of his anointed.”

Second Reading

Hebrews 10:11–25

And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,

“This is the covenant that I will make with them
after those days, declares the Lord:

I will put my laws on their hearts,
and write them on their minds,”

then he adds,

“I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”

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

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near 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. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (ESV)

Gospel Text

Mark 13:1–8

And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!” And Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?” And Jesus began to say to them, “See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains. (ESV)

Comments/Questions for discussion.

First Reading (and the Psalm)

We have this week (part of) the story of Samuel's miraculous birth and Hannah's joyful response to that blessing in the form of a song. Many of us will recognize in this stories things that are echoed in Luke, the miraculous births of John and Jesus, and Mary's song of exultation. What may escape us though, is that the story of the birth of Samuel has its own precursor in the story of Samson's birth, which begins with another barren woman and another angelic announcement. While 1 Samuel lacks an angel *per se*, Eli, the stumbling and ineffective priest serves in the role of announcer.

There is something peculiar in the story of Hannah and Samuel that begins in verse 17 of our text today. When Eli speaks of that which Hannah "has made" to YHWH, he actually says "the petition that you have *asked* of Him." That may not seem that important, but the verb "ask" has the root *sha'ul* in Hebrew. That sounds like Saul. Indeed, it is the root of his name, too. That root pops up seven times in the following verses, concluding with the the next to last verse among those I added in italics, "He is lent (*sha'ul* again) to the Lord."

This has led some scholars to conclude that this story was originally a story of Saul's birth, later adapted to tell about Samuel. After all, it concludes with "He is the LORD's Saul (*sha'ul*)." That is another way to translate "He is lent to the Lord." But it seems just as likely to me that another conclusion, suggested by James Ackerman, is the reason this word is so often used. The author/redactor of this segment of 1 Samuel intended to cast up a contrast between the prophet and the king. By using *sha'ul* to describe Samuel, he is saying that Samuel, not Saul, is the one requested of the LORD.

Then we have Hannah's song, which certainly served as a model for the Magnificat, which we'll read in a few weeks. This song, or psalm, is widely regarded as an example of a song of royal victory. Because of the mention of a king, it is often dated sometime after the onset of the monarchy, though it is possible that the reference is to a city-king, rather than a national king, which would allow for much earlier dating. It is thought that it was used and applied to Hannah because of the mention of the birth of children. In any case, it began elsewhere as a victory psalm, and was later incorporated into the story of Samuel's birth.

There is wide consensus among scholars that 1 Samuel is a book made of of several other sources. Just what those sources were and how and by whom they were assembled isn't nearly as clear. In some opinions the final redactor seems to be little more than someone who pastes and copies. In others, the he seems a skilled editor and author in his own right. This all leaves me asking, "How do I approach a text with so many component

parts and read it faithfully?” I think the answer to that question is too long for this Divergence, but I’ll leave it for you to ponder.

Second Reading

Well, our NT readings today are full of OT echoes, aren’t they? We have two quotes in Hebrews from the OT. I do find it interesting that when it’s cited, the author doesn’t include the citation itself. If every you feel inadequate because you can’t cite chapter and verse when you quote Scripture, remember this. Jesus didn’t do it when He quoted the OT, and neither does this author. In fact, it hardly ever happens, and one time, when the book (not chapter and verse) is quoted, the author gets it wrong. (cites the wrong prophet)

It’s important to know what’s in there. It doesn’t give you more authority to be able to cite chapter and verse.

Okay, so here in Hebrews the author is quoting Jeremiah 31. The first quote is a reference to verse 33, and the second quote refers to verse 34 if you want to look them up. I’m sure they looked familiar to you.

Here’s the text from Jeremiah

Jeremiah 31:33–34

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

You’ll notice something here. The quotes aren’t exact. Sort of a paraphrase. This is especially interesting in that the author of Hebrews quotes the same verses *quoted precisely* earlier in chapter 8. It is important to note too, that, at least in this case, chapter 8 quotes the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures) and chapter 10 alters the Septuagint. The manner of the use of the Hebrew Scriptures in this epistle has been the subject of a lot of comment over the years. Most often he quotes the Septuagint. But there are two extant versions of the Septuagint which don’t always

agree. When they disagree our author sometimes reverts to the Masoretic Text (Hebrew) and sometimes seems to use something that may be even older.

In the case of our quotes today, though, the author has shown a clear willingness simply to alter the text to suit his interpretive needs. I learned this week that such a willingness is also found in the texts of the Qumran community, the Dead Sea Scrolls. While they did not do so with the books of the Law, it wasn't uncommon for them to change the texts of the Prophets or the Writings to suit their needs. It seems likely that the author of Hebrews knew this hermeneutical principle and made use of it in this instance.

Having said all that, I want to point to the utter confidence in God's good will for us that the text also asks us to have. We are invited to approach the very Throne of God with clear consciences. Not because we've never messed up, but because they are cleansed by the sprinkling of the Blood of Jesus. You know, I never made this connection between the sprinkling here (a reference to the way things were purified in the Temple by sprinkling with the blood of a sacrificial lamb) and the sprinkling of water at Baptism in traditions like ours until this very minute. Holy cow.

But it is that confidence, which can only be found in 1) our admission to ourselves and to God that apart from this sprinkling we'd never survive the approach to the throne and 2) that we therefore place *all* our trust in the power of the Blood of Jesus to make us worthy, it is that confidence that allows us to walk fearlessly through life. And heaven knows, the world needs a lot more fearless people walking around these days.

Gospel text

I've written elsewhere of Mark's "little apocalypse" in chapter 13, and how I tend to expand my understanding of what falls under "apocalypse" in Mark to include some of the things we read in chapter 12 as well. (Just as the Revelation to John includes words of encouragement in the opening chapters in the letters to the seven cities, so chapter 12 includes teachings as well.) So here we get to the scarier part, the predictions of the frightening things that are to come, but Jesus is very clear. These events aren't to be worrisome to His hearers. Rather they are to be seen as encouragement that the end of one broken system is upon them so that it might be replaced by a better one.

He speaks to his disciples of the persecutions and peril to come **for them** but it doesn't mean it has nothing to say to you and me. This harkens back to what I have said in earlier Divergences. I think that the crumbling of systems that we've relied upon is in some ways inevitable. When I first wrote this three years ago I wrote from a place of somewhat arrogant privilege. I wrote that we are not to be concerned with this collapse for two reasons: 1) Because nothing founded on the Rock that is Jesus can fall, so if they

fall, these systems sure weren't founded on Him and 2) Because anything that does crumble this way under its own weight only does so to make way for something better. We won't see the fullness of that "better" until Jesus returns, but each of these phases moves us that much closer to the "day."

Today, I am humbled by the weight of the grief and fear of those around me who do not enjoy the privilege of being a white, cis-gendered man in the United States. I still cling to the hope that Jesus enjoins here. What was must come down for the Kingdom to come in, but the pain of that is much more real to me today, and repent of my high-handedness of three years ago. Learning from the brave souls who confront current realities from a place of much greater vulnerability, I see the honor and the courage of following Jesus and clinging to determination and hope in the face of much more real danger and heartbreak.