

1 Samuel 1:4-20

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.”

Mark 13:1-8

¹³As he 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.

HOW CAN WE NOT BE ALARMED?

Okay, so how many of you know of a Christian or Christians who have broadcast predictions about the end of the world? Seen them at subway stations? Heard them on the radio? Show of hands, please. How many feel a bit embarrassed to be a Christian when passing (stealthily) by such people? Try to ignore them? The truth is it's part of our Bible, a part that really fascinates a lot of people, and though I personally am very dismissive of folks who get fixated on "the end times" and am apt to roll my eyes and tell them on no uncertain terms that their potato has been baking too long, I know that there may come a time when they'll be right and everyone else will be wrong. I mean, statistics tell us that they can't be wrong ALL the time, right? But regardless of whether these people are right or just a little loony, they don't **alarm** me.

Nor does today's Gospel reading. Today's Gospel lesson should not be taken as some revelation about the end of the world; indeed Jesus later in this chapter says that "no one knows" the day or the hour: only God knows. So the message that we should take with us, from today's Gospel lesson, is to ***not be alarmed***. Two days ago Paris suffered its worst attack since World War II as terrorists managed to kill over 129 people and seriously injure over a hundred more. Such an attack not only makes us anxious but it also dredges up our memories of 9-11, a time of crisis in our nation. Our natural response when disasters strike is to *be alarmed*. So how can we *not* be alarmed?

How can we avoid being alarmed when we lose our sense of security? We spend a lot of time and money on security. About 20% of our national budget goes to national defense so that we have arguably the strongest military in the world. Add federal, state, and local spending on law enforcement and corrections, which involves public safety, and add our discretionary spending on security, personal, home and business, and that's a big chunk of change spent on security, on our need to feel safe. So when we as a sovereign nation with a strong police force and a powerful military and an excellent intelligence agency, a nation with plenty of reason to feel secure, are attacked by religious fanatics wearing dynamite vests, when children are slaughtered by young men with assault rifles, *we are alarmed*. Our sense of security is shattered again. Sometimes we point fingers at our government or our police force or intelligence community and ask, "Why couldn't you prevent this?" But we know that the truth is that, regardless of how strong we are, how intelligent we are, how careful we are, disasters will occur.

Because even if we protected ourselves from all foreign enemies, and even if we were able to keep guns out of the hands of criminals or the mentally ill, we would still not feel secure, because we know that all human institutions, public or private, are potentially corrupt and never reliable. How many lives have been lost on account of building standards not being met by contractors who would cut corners to increase profits, and how many government officials would take a bribe to turn a blind eye? How many people suffer from health issues because standards were not enforced? How many hard working people lose their jobs daily because of mismanagement at a higher level? And how many investors lose their savings because they trust an institution that is supposed to take care of investors but instead take them for a ride? Ever heard of Lehman Brothers, a "reputable" investment company, or Bernie Madoff who "made off" with millions of dollars from people who trusted him with most of their hard-earned savings? *How can we not be alarmed?*

And what about the Church? Isn't the Church also a human institution? Yes; we are *very* human. It's as prone to corruption as any business or government is. It's as prone to corruption as individuals are. It's as corruptible as the Jerusalem Temple was. In today's gospel lesson, one of Jesus' disciples notes how magnificent the Temple in Jerusalem was with its big buildings and its huge stones. Jesus must have been shaking his head when he heard that. Hadn't he just finished telling the disciples to beware the scribes and Pharisees who prey on poor widows? He responds by telling the disciple, who probably would prefer to remain unnamed, that the day is coming when *not one stone will remain on another*. And he was right; in 70 A.D., a relatively short time after Jesus' death and resurrection, the Temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed. The Temple was like the Capital building to the Jews of Jesus day because there was no separation of church and state – the church *was* the state, and the religious authorities had a very fragile peace with the Romans – as long as the Jews paid their taxes Rome would leave them alone. But the people were suffering, and as Jesus reminded us last week, the Temple was run by people who were robbing poor widows. There are 'churches' out there today that prey on widows and the elderly and the naïve just as the Jerusalem Temple did. We've heard of scandals, of children being molested, of pastors and priests who betray trust and who line their own pockets. We can find plenty to criticize in the church in general or in the people who lead the church.

And yet I know that people come to church to find there serenity, their peace in order that they may "not be alarmed" at all the havoc happening personally or globally. Because the only way I know to find peace and to "not be alarmed;" is by putting your trust in God. That's what Old Testament lesson tells us. Hannah, who is the old maid – and back then, that was the worst put-down a woman could receive: "You ain't got no children, nah nah nah nah nah nah." – because that was a woman's job back then. Hannah wants a child so bad, but she is barren. So what does she do? ***SHE PRAYS!*** She prays so hard she looks drunk! Eli the priest takes notice, and says, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant your petition." And you know what happens? *She goes in peace!* I don't know if she knows whether the God of Israel is going to grant her petition. I don't know if it mattered to her at that time whether she had a child or not; we just know that Hannah was no longer sad. Why? She had prayed. She had placed her trust in the Lord!

My friends, as much as we try to control what goes on around us, as much as we try to make our lives predictable, we know that there's so much unpredictability that can shatter our sense of security. Most of us have lived through 9-11. Some of us have lost love ones, some have gone through financial hardship, health issues, *some that we could look back on and say, "I should have seen it coming," but some things that we could not predict*. In this very uncertain world, there's only one place where we can place our trust: in God. There's only one place where we are certain to find peace: in God. There is only one place where our sadness can be changed to joy: in God.

And as imperfect as I am, and as imperfect as we are, the Church should be our source of peace, because it's not only about praying; it's about loving one another, encouraging one another, accepting one another, comforting one another, and correcting one another in love in order that we would become better ministers to one another and to the world community. The Church is the place where we are reminded that God is the only certainty in this world. And the sooner we come to trust in God, in life and in death, the sooner we find that peace, and that joy, and the

sooner we are freed from fear in order that we may love. The sooner we enter God's kingdom where we can remain, trusting in the one eternal God. Amen.