

May 11 – Mother’s Day

Faith of our Mothers

Since it is Mother’s Day I decided to look at some of the great mothers of scripture and see what they have to teach us about faith. I could preach an entire sermon about any of them. They are remarkable women striving to be faithful in sometimes very difficult personal circumstances. To take one small snippet of their life and hold it up for examination is in one sense unfair. For any of these women you can, and with justification, say “But what about....?” Yes, I will leave much more unsaid concerning them than what I say as I share a small piece of their faith life. What I lift up may not be what you feel is the most important and may not even be the part you think should be mentioned!! With these qualifiers we will begin. In each case I am going to read a piece of scripture and then talk about their life.

## **I Samuel 1:15-17**

But Hannah answered (to Eli the Priest), ‘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. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time.’ Then Eli answered, ‘Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him.’

We begin with Hannah the mother of Samuel the prophet. Hannah was childless, a condition that in her society meant she was cursed by God. Her husband had another wife who taunted Hannah by reminding her that she had given her husband lots of children. Finally, one day when they were at the sacred shrine at Shilo, this was before the building of the temple, Hannah goes and pours out her troubles to God. Her pain is so great that she doesn’t even speak aloud her thoughts, as was the custom, but stands there in her misery wordlessly sharing her hurt. Eli, the head priest, had seen this kind of action in the past and the person had been drunk and so chastised Hannah for

coming into the holy space while intoxicated. Something that was a likely occurrence, I believe, during a festival time. This is why she says in the scripture she is not drunk.

That Hannah would turn to God is really amazing. As I said, society had told her that God had cursed her. She did not believe it but instead believed God would help her. She receives the blessing of Eli and her prayer is answered and she gives birth to Samuel whom she dedicates to God and he goes on to become the greatest prophet of ancient Israel.

We can identify with Hannah. If you have lived long enough you have had to deal with great pain and sorrow. All of us have known those times when the events of life cause us to hurt deep down to our soul. We wonder if God cares about what we are experiencing. Hannah reminds us that we can always turn our problems over to God. No matter how bad they might be, how much hurt we may feel or distress we feel over one we love who has messed up, God is present. We may not always have our problems resolved in such a timely fashion as was Hannah's experience, because within a year she gives birth to Samuel, but we are told that we are heard, that God blesses us in our trials and we do not need to face things alone. So from the faith of Hannah we learn to turn things over to God.

### **Ruth 1:16-18**

But Ruth said, 'Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!' When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

Ruth is at a crossroads. She had married Naomi's son and in her culture she was obligated to take care of Naomi, her mother-in-law. Ruth's husband had died, along with his brother and father leaving three women as widows. Naomi had decided to return home and so at the border between Moab and Judah Naomi releases her two daughters-in-law from their obligations. Orpah, turns back but Ruth makes a different

decision. She says she will stay with Naomi even through the tough times. When the only road forward seems to be one of endings, a future without hope, she remains steadfast.

Again, we, like Ruth, have had those crossroad kinds of moments. These are times when it would be easy to let go of commitments we have made. Her faith challenges us to take the more difficult path of remaining faithful even when it seems that doing so will only cause us hardship. There is something creative that can happen in being steadfast in our commitments. What seems a road block can open up into new paths that were never expected and would not have happened if we had not been faithful.

This is what happens for Ruth. Because of her loyalty to Naomi God creates a new beginning for the two of them. She meets Boaz who is impressed by the loyalty she is showing. Respect blossoms into love and they are married and a child, the grandfather of David, the greatest of Israel's kings, is born. This story ends with Naomi's friends saying Ruth is worth more than seven sons, the highest compliment you could give a woman at that time. All because she was willing to risk and remain faithful.

Ruth reminds us that loyalty in relationships and in faith counts. We live in a society where much of life is centered on our own wants and needs. Relationships are quickly broken, vows ignored because they are inconvenient. Sacrifice for the good of others is not always something that is found in our framework of meaning. Yet, loyalty and steadfastness is the underpinnings of relationships and of faith. A willingness to continue going to church even when it is inconvenient to our schedules builds a level of trust in God that will help us when times get tough. Knowing there is someone who will stand beside us no matter what gives us courage. So from the faith of Ruth we are challenged to be loyal, to God, to our faith and to our friends and family.

### **Luke 2:34-35**

Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be

opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

Much is said about Mary, the mother of Jesus. Today I want to lift up her example of being faithful in the midst of great pain and loss. Her future heart ache was predicted when Jesus was presented at the Temple. As we heard in the scripture the prophet Simeon talks about how a sword will pierce her soul. This dire prediction is realized as she stands at the foot of Jesus’ cross. There his compassion for her pain causes Jesus, with some of his last remaining strength, to give her into the care of his beloved disciple John. We think of Mary at Christmas hearing the news she will have a son. After some questions that she had are answered she accepts the task. We talk about her faith and willingness to say yes. But there is the other side. She continued to say yes when she knew it was going to be hard. She continued to be there supporting and loving as only a mother can. She was with him until the end. Hers is a faith that reminds us that just because we say yes to God does not mean that life will be easy.

We can identify with Mary. We have had to stand by when someone we love hurts or dies. We have felt that sword of grief and loss pierced our souls. At some time in our past we had said yes to a relationship knowing that it might only end in death. We celebrate all these commitments because they give us great joy in spite of the pain.

Mary reminds us that when we are filled with great love for God we can, with grace, endure even the worst of events. Mary’s faith reminds us that God invites each of us to say yes, to invite God fully into our beings and then filled with that love share the love of God with all even when life is at its most difficult. Her example reminds us to trust in God and God’s love even when life’s challenges are greatest.

## **2 Timothy 1:4-5**

Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.

I am going to talk about two women here, Lois and Eunice, who remind us that faith foundations often, but not always, begin at home. Paul sees in his young friend Timothy a spark of faith that he had noticed in his mother and grandmother. We often say that Timothy is the first named third generation Christian. There may have been others but we do not know about them. We sometimes forget the powerful force of nurturing that we as parents and I think even more as grandparents can have in the lives of those we touch.

I recently had the privilege of having my nephew visit for an afternoon. John is in his mid 40's. He is a dedicated member of his church. I thought of these words of Paul for I see the faith of my father, his grandfather in John. John grew up in a house in turmoil. His parents and later, after their divorce, his mother rarely went to church. But, with a bit of encouragement from my dad when John needed to attend a private school, they chose a Christian school. Even more, John and my dad spent a lot of time together. I can't help but believe that through my dad's quiet support and counsel he nurtured that germ of faith that sprang into a sturdy life-giving part of his life. So we hear of the faith of Eunice and Lois and are reminded and challenged to live our lives in such a way that our children and, for most of us, our grandchildren and great grandchildren might see why it is so important to us and perhaps that awareness will cause a spark of faith to be kindled in them.

So as we honor our mothers let us also honor the faith of our mother's in faith. They may be our own mothers and grandmothers or they might be Sunday school teachers or friends, women who nourished our faith by word an example and in honor of them we will live following their example.