

**Easter Sunday 1 April 2018**  
**1 Samuel 2**  
**St Peters Pretoria**

Dear congregation!

Three thousand years ago, in ancient Israel, lived a man, Elkanah. He had two wives - a common practise in those times. One he loved more than everything else - a sad reality for Peninnah, the "other wife". But Peninnah had children, quite a number of them. Hannah, the dearly beloved one, was without children - a painful reality for wife number one!

In those days in that culture a woman was regarded as inferior, incomplete, when she had no children. And Peninnah was rubbing it in! It could have been in the following way:

"You are only half a woman! Your name might be "Hannah" - "favoured grace" - but what a mistake! It should be "shameful disgrace". Perhaps, instead of Grace, I shall call you "Disgrace!"

And during meals, I can imagine scenes like these. "Come on, children, now eat properly. Show Hannah how well behaved you are! She has no children, she is not used to children. She might even be irritated by children!"

Or, during casual conversation: "Shame, poor Hannah! Who is going to take care of you when our husband Elkanah can no longer provide? I mean, without children you are quite lost, aren't you? It must be giving you sleepless nights!"

We do not know what Peninnah actually said to Hannah. We do read that what she said drove Hannah to tears, made her lose her appetite, made her despair. The darkest time for her was the annual family trip to the temple. Elkanah would divide the offering meat into portions. Although Hannah always got the prime cut, it was nothing compared to the heap of meat that Peninnah received for herself and all her children.

This religious highlight was Hannah's darkest time!

In the temple she cried, wept, prayed to God to give her a son. If he does, she would surrender him for full time service to God. Then, finally, God answered her prayers. She had a son of her own, Samuel - "God heard". After all the years of teasing, tears and misery, she finally was a mother too!

It is not surprising that she erupts into a song of praise! (the text for our sermon)

Hannah prayed and said:

**My heart rejoices in the LORD;  
in the LORD my horn is lifted high.  
My mouth boasts over my enemies,  
for I delight in your deliverance.  
There is no one holy like the LORD;  
there is no one besides you;  
there is no Rock like our God.  
"The LORD brings death and makes alive;  
he brings down to the grave and raises up.  
The LORD sends poverty and wealth;  
he humbles and he exalts.  
He raises the poor from the dust  
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;  
he seats them with princes  
and has them inherit a throne of honour.**

The joy of finally having a child radiates from this song. One thing, however, leaves me speechless: she sings this song, not at his birth, but when she hands over the young boy at the temple, to see him again only once a year. How can she, at such a sad occasion, still formulate this song of worship?

We have to understand it on the background of that culture: Without having given birth to a child a woman was incomplete. She was seen as being cursed by God. For a woman bearing the name Hannah ("God is gracious") it was a double curse, a mockery of her name and existence. That is why Hannah, when asking God for a child, could promise to give that child into his service. More important than having a child to care for her, was that the curse was broken, that she could enter the status of "complete womanhood", that the meaning of her name became her reality. In our time of equal opportunities, gender equality and "childless-by-choice-marriages", this is very difficult to understand. But in that culture, to have a child after so

many years of trying, meant to enter a new world, a new reality, a new status.

The song that Hannah sings, is not a song of praise when the boy was born, but a song of thanks and praise to God for changing her from incomplete to complete, from “half a woman” to “favoured grace”. Now she was truly “Hannah” - God is gracious. And because God is gracious she could surrender her son to Him without losing her completeness!

The song shows how she was seen by society and how she saw herself before she gave birth: dead inside, her womb was a tomb, she was poor, humiliated, like someone living in dust and ashes. But through God’s grace the tomb became a womb, she became alive, became blessed and complete. She sings:

**He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap;  
he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honour**

She now proudly “sits with princes” - she can take her place at the side of her husband as mother and woman! She can participate fully in the temple celebrations. Peninnah can no longer mock her!

This extensive background to this song shows why it applies to Easter morning.

Easter is about much more than just the resurrection of one person, Jesus Christ, from the dead. With his resurrection the whole universe entered a new era. The time of “half-life”, of incompleteness has come to an end.

Up to the resurrection of Christ, death had the final word. Our life would be one from birth to death. Full stop. Nothing else. For some it is 80 or 90 years, for others just a few minutes - that’s it! From the womb ... to the tomb.

Every illness, every set back would be like Peninnah’s mocking: You are a feeble human being, worthless, insignificant. In that sense Death took the place of Peninnah. At every funeral death would mock: See, I am the successful one! I reap each and every life! Life itself keeps nothing. Life loses every time!

But at the resurrection of Christ everything changes. a door opens, through

death to completion. The tomb of Christ becomes the womb of new life, the womb of re-creation! Because of Christ, also my tomb will become the womb of life!

Because of Easter Death is no longer the end! This current life is no longer our full story. Through Christ’s resurrection we receive a new status: from mortal human beings we change to God’s eternal children!

Peninnah’s mocking, Death’s mocking has lost it’s power! Death, you do not have the last say! Life has! Christ has!

In 1 Samuel 1 we read that the change for Hannah started when she received the assurance from the prophet Eli that God would answer her prayer. Even before Samuel was conceived, Hannah could laugh again, eat again, celebrate with the family. Why? Because she had received a promise from God. That promise on it’s own already changed her life, long before it became reality.

Like God’s promise to Hannah, Jesus Christ gives us a promise: I live, and you too shall live! (John 14,19) I am waiting for the promise to be fulfilled. For now I still have to go to work, or look for a job. I still battle with my finances. I still have problems with colleagues. I still battle to do homework or to learn. At face value nothing has changed.

Yet, because of Christ’s victory over death my status has changed! This life on earth is no longer everything. It has, through Christ, become “part one”. There is more to follow, much more! Completeness is coming! In Christ Jesus I now am eternal. My status has changed forever!

**My heart rejoices in the LORD; in the LORD my horn is lifted high.  
My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance.**

**There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you;  
there is no Rock like our God.**

**“The LORD brings death and makes alive;  
he brings down to the grave and raises up.**

Amen

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