

"Where Are You Standing?"

1 Sam. 1:4-20; 1 Sam. 2:1-10;

Mk. 13:1-8.

Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church

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Saturday morning cartoons were always a regular feature when I was growing up. There were no soccer leagues to run off to or other pressing activities. It was a time to sleep in and then eat those "magically delicious" Lucky Charms and to watch Scooby Doo and Mr. Magoo.

I especially liked to watch each week as the sight-challenged Magoo would walk through all sorts of dangerous places - on and off of I-beams and through construction sites, totally oblivious to where he was and the danger he was in.

Those of us watching him could see exactly what was happening and where he was. Even though he was "just a cartoon character" we worried about him because from where we were we could see he was in danger.

Last Sunday we were standing in the Temple with Jesus as he pointed out the Widow making her offering. It seemed small, by any earthly standard, and yet it was an extravagant gift. Jesus helped us to see it for what it really was. But, we wouldn't have been able to do that from where we were standing without his divine intervention.

Today we are encountering stories that again raise the question: "Where are we standing?" and "What do we see?" Surrounded by the huge stones and buildings of the Temple area, all the disciples can do is gawk and be amazed. They are "Temple Tourists."

Jesus, however, sees the "permanence" of the Temple as a very temporary thing indeed, predicting the destruction of the Temple and all that it stands for. He knows that the end is near and that a new beginning is at hand. He knows the danger of putting our trust in anything based solely on where we are standing and what we see with our limited spiritual sight.

The story from First Samuel harkens back to a time before the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem, back to a time when Israel was at risk and the future leadership of the people was in doubt. Once again the story begins, not with a battle or with the entrance of powerful people, it begins with a woman who has a problem.

As with Abraham and Sarah before her, Hannah is a woman who believes that God has good things in store for, but she just can't see it because of her life situation and where she is standing. She is barren.

And like Sarah, she too is faced with another woman in the household who has children and is treating her with contempt. For Hannah - for anyone - it is a hard thing to endure. The Bible simply says, "So it went on, year after year."

This year was no different. On their annual trek to the worship site at Shiloh, Hannah becomes distraught again, to the point of not eating. Her husband Elkanah, who loves her deeply, tries to make things better in a typical "guy" kind of way. "But Hannah, cheer up, you've still got me..."

It doesn't help. Hannah goes by herself to worship and is so caught up in her prayers that, from where the old priest Eli is standing, he thinks she is drunk and scolds her.

But Hannah explains the reason for her distress and Eli, to his credit, blesses her and sends her on her way.

Was that the "tipping point"? Was having someone else hear her and really listen and offer hope the thing that Hannah most needed to keep her hope alive?

Hannah's faith in God's goodness is eventually rewarded with the birth of Samuel who will become the mightiest prophet since Moses, and the one to stand between the time of the Judges and the time of the Kings.

Things that Hannah could not see come into focus for us. Where we are standing makes a difference. We stand on the solid ground of faith in Jesus Christ and that is supposed to make a difference to us. It is supposed to give us "strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow" as the hymn says.

But the reality is that we get caught up in the things that we see and experience from our limited vantage point. We need the witness of the Spirit and the wealth of Scripture to help us especially when we are struggling to see anything good happening in our lives or in the lives of others whom we love, or in the world around us. We need others who can really listen and who can stand with us as we struggle to make sense of our lives.

So what is the message? Are we supposed to pray as though we are drunk? I'm not sure that is a recipe for successful prayer petitions! Are we to have courage to express our heart's desire before the Lord? Well, yes, I think that is more on track. Are we to trust that God has our very best in mind and even when the events of our lives seem to be working in direct opposition to

anything that we might call "good", we are to remember that where we are standing doesn't always offer us the best vantage point to see what God has in store?

Again and again, the witness of people's experience with God down through the ages (that's called the Bible, by the way) lifts us up to see things differently and to believe that God's ways are not our ways and where God stands is not where we stand, but oh, how we long to stand closer to where God is standing.

On this Consecration Sunday we are asked to stand on holy ground and to wait in hope and in expectation that God has good things in store for each of us and for Chapel Lane.

As this unfolding journey of faith continues, we pray for trusting and discerning hearts, hearts that are open to the prayers of others, open to responding with our resources and our resolve to do more than just wait for God to show up, but to take action to make a positive difference as the body of Christ here in this place and wherever we are, believing that as we walk in faith, we are moving closer to God's promised land and to the place of blessing that God has in store for us.

May it be so, for Jesus' sake. Amen.