

GOD VERSUS OMNISHAMBLES

Pentecost 25 – Year B: 1 Samuel. 1:4-20; Mark. 13:1-8

Our British friends are in love with a new word that actually made its first appearance in one of their sitcoms in 2009, but is now taking on new life in the British Parliament as the Opposition politicians continue their attack on Prime Minister David Cameron's budget, tabled earlier this year. The word is "omnishambles", and it describes people or situations who are a complete disaster. When everything goes wrong, it's "omnishambles". When someone makes mistake after mistake, he or she is "omnishambles". Apparently, after his visit to England last July to get a preview of the London Olympics and to meet a number of British politicians – a trip during which he made a number of missteps – Mitt Romney returned to America to a new television ad from the Democratic Party describing his attempt to make friends abroad as "Romneyshambles". Earlier this week, I heard an interview in which a number of newly-coined words were being discussed. By far, the favourite of one of the panelists was "omnishambles" because it is descriptive of so much of what is going on in our world today. You get to use it several times a week. Everywhere we look, it seems, it's omnishambles. Two of this morning's readings brought the term to mind: Hannah's life before Samuel was omnishambles; the prophecy Jesus makes in our Gospel is a glimpse of the world in omnishambles.

I expect one of the reasons omnishambles has found such resonance with people is that we know well the condition it describes. In Confirmation class the last few weeks, we've been reading through some of the stories in Genesis – Noah's Flood and the Tower of Babel are two of them. It seems that even a few hundred years before Jesus' birth people were trying to make sense of life at its most confused moments. "God must be angry," was one construction they placed on times when everything was going wrong. But their explanations didn't always ring true, especially when they began to know God more certainly as "the God of steadfast love" and "God as liberator." The psalmist understood God as "the Good Shepherd" in Psalm 23 and as our "refuge and strength" in Psalm 46. In today's canticle, Hannah proclaims God as "the Rock." In other parts of the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, we can read of God making covenant and even renewing covenant with the chosen people when they fail to remain faithful. During their years of exile, the prophets called to the Hebrew people to turn again to the God who watched and waited for them and desired to return them to their homeland for yet another new beginning.

For Christians, the birth, life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is the full and final revelation of God: in both teaching and action, Jesus proclaims the unambiguous goodness of God, God's solidarity with the human condition, and the power of God's love to heal, rescue, save, redeem, and transform the world from its default condition of omnishambles and sin. The God of the Ancestors and God as revealed in Christ Jesus is "the God of Good News" for the perennial bad news of omnishambles.

Elkanah chose Hannah as his wife, and without question, he loved her more than life itself. But she was unable to have children and, as was the custom and because he was a man of means he took a second wife Peninnah who was able to bear children. The relationship between the two women was difficult: Elkanah favoured Hannah, and out of jealousy Peninnah taunted her. Hannah's life was omnishambles, and so she bares her soul to the God she has come to know at home and at temple as "the God who saves". Because the world she knew and the world we know, for that matter, was and is transactional, she makes God an offer. If God were to bless her with a son, she prays, she would return him to God as a Nazirite – one whose vocation and life is dedicated to God. God does bless Hannah in the birth of Samuel who, as we know from reading on in the accounts of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings figures prominently in bringing together the Hebrew people, first under Saul, and eventually under David. "The Lord remembered her," the author of 1 Samuel records; and in that shining understatement the curtain is drawn back to reveal the God who reaches through the bane of human suffering to touch individual lives with healing and release.

It is this same God Jesus proclaims even and especially through all the omnishambles he describes in today's Gospel. The reign of God is being born, he tells his disciples. The world will be thrown into disorder and suffering by wars and rumours of wars, earthquakes, famines, nation rising up against nation, but these, Jesus says, are but the beginning of the birth pangs. As God reached through Hannah's suffering to bless her, so God reaches through all of human suffering with such love and such

power. There are no limits to God's blessing. There are no restrictions on God's powerful Word of life in a world of omnishambles.

Our call in Christ, our call in the testimony of Holy Scripture, our call in the animating presence of the Holy Spirit is to proclaim this Word, to embody this Word, to be present in this Word. It is so easy to be co-opted by omnishambles. Illness, loss, uncertainty, alienation, struggle, adversity of every kind fills our consciousness as daily we hear or experience crisis after crisis, disappointment after disappointment. We are no strangers to sin and its effects in our world. But we have an option to bless, to be good news, to use our faith in Christ Jesus to share hope and bear light in the darkness. It is a high calling, and it is an essential calling. With heart and hands, we need to replace the omnishambles we find virtually everywhere with trust in God's goodness, with love and justice and presence; to be truly people for others; to bless and, in the grace and mystery of the Holy Spirit, even become those who are blessed.

And the good news of the gospel is that as the Lord remembered Hannah, the Lord will remember us.