

Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
1st June 2021

READINGS

This last week I have been preparing for my theory and my practical driving tests so that I can continue to drive after my international license expires in August. I have to admit it has been a nail-biting time. Who really wants to take an exam when you are in your 50s?? I thought I was done with that and was happy to be at the point in life where school was a distant memory. The biggest fear this time has uncovered has been that of failure. I do not think I am alone in worrying about failing. We all want to be a success. Yet sometimes failing is a part of life too. When I worked on my PhD there were many times that I had to revise my writing and had to throw out what I had done and begin again. That failure helped to make my work stronger. Thankfully, I have a friend who has moved here from the US several years back who gave us some tips. He had failed the drivers' test repeatedly and instead of allowing it to crush him and give up, he persisted, and he finally passed. He is not a bad driver but there are some things we do differently in the US (like driving on the right or checking our mirrors after we put on our indicator instead of before!). Our friend's experience with failure was a blessing for me because he shared all that he learned. Listening to him helped me to sort myself out before I took the test. I was reminded of this lesson this morning before I went to take my test. I received the daily devotional from Sanctuary First <https://www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/daily-worship/secret-heroine> that focused on praising God when things do not go our way. It was about the story of Hannah and how God turned her sorrow into blessings. I love this quote from the devotional, "When everyone sees failure God sees faithfulness." I was hopeful that God was not trying to give me a hint that I might fail the exam. The truth is I could have done so. I was nervous and of course people often make mistakes when they are anxious. Maybe God wanted to know that I would continue to praise him even if I "failed". Before I left this morning, I told God I would praise him no matter what happened...but of course I would be happier if I passed the exam!

*Hannah prayed and said,
'My heart exults in the LORD;
my strength is exalted in my God.
My mouth derides my enemies,
because I rejoice in my victory.
'There is no Holy One like the LORD,
no one besides you;
there is no Rock like our God.
Talk no more so very proudly,
let not arrogance come from your mouth;
for the LORD is a God of knowledge,
and by him actions are weighed.
The bows of the mighty are broken,
but the feeble gird on strength.
Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,
but those who were hungry are fat with spoil.
The barren has borne seven,
but she who has many children is forlorn.*

*The LORD kills and brings to life;
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.
The LORD makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low, he also exalts.
He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap,
to make them sit with princes
and inherit a seat of honour.
For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's,
and on them he has set the world.
'He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness;
for not by might does one prevail.
The LORD! His adversaries shall be shattered;
the Most High will thunder in heaven.
The LORD will judge the ends of the earth;
he will give strength to his king,
and exalt the power of his anointed.'*

1 Samuel 2:1-10

Hannah knew the shame of failing due to no fault of her own. She was a childless woman in an ancient culture that looked down upon women for not having a family. She longed to be a mother and yet it was out of her control. She continued to trust God even when others would mock and insult her. The Lord became her strength as this passage reminds us. She could trust the Lord to meet her needs even when her situation seemed impossible. She knew God was greater than her deep pain. She knew the Lord had a way for her to survive. She probably never imagined that God would give her the desire of her heart long after she had given up hope. Yet, God takes his children and raises them out of the ashes as verse 8 describes. Each one of us no matter what our tests and failures might be can trust our all-powerful God to give us hope and new beginnings.

REFLECTION

Helen Keller born in the late 19th century was a prolific writer and activist for the rights of the differently able. She lost her hearing and sight at the age of 19 months and could not speak (except for signs) until years later when she gained new skills through the persistence of her teacher Anne Sullivan. Helen knew all about failure and the power of trying again. I love this quote of hers:

"I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do something that I can do."

You may be feeling like there are many things you cannot do. Perhaps you can no longer drive because of illness or age. Perhaps you can no longer work because of disability or being made redundant. There are so many tests and trials that come at us every day and yet we can do what is put before us. We can keep moving and try to make the best of what we have in our lives. That is what Hannah did and one day she was amazed at the miracle God brought into her life. Sometimes we do not receive the

miracle we are hoping for and sometimes we do not pass the test, but it is important to keep on loving God and serving him no matter the outcome.

Sanctuary First, reminded me this morning to dwell on Psalm 113 verses 1-3:

“Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, you his servants;
praise the name of the Lord.
Let the name of the Lord be praised,
both now and for evermore.
From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets,
the name of the Lord is to be praised.”

It goes on to say in the devotional:

“Psalm 113 invites us when we are overwhelmed with trouble and injustice to look to God. To just speak his name. To shout a Hallelujah in defiance! When everyone else sees failure God can see faithfulness. Don’t be discouraged. Change is coming — get ready — sing a Hallelujah.”

I hope that wherever you are today and whatever struggles you are facing you will sing a Hallelujah to the Lord and trust him even if you are discouraged! I did today and though I am grateful I do not have to take my driving test again (I passed!) I would have continued to praise the Lord even if I had failed. Faithfulness is more important than failure.

PRAYER

Faithful God, thank you that we can trust you completely.
Thank you that even when we fail and stumble, you are there to catch us.
Thank you, Lord that when we are uncertain you always give us just what we need to keep moving.
Give us strength to not focus on our failures but to sing a Hallelujah to you even then.
We know you are good and you always have our best interests at heart.
Help us to learn from our missteps and to stay close to you always, especially in challenging times.

In Jesus name we offer our prayers,
Amen.

