

## **Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost. 18 November 2018. When is enough not enough?**

Have you ever been at a function when someone has started pouring liquid into your glass and said “Say when.” And you have been distracted. And ... you end up with a very full glass!!

When is enough, enough?

Do you have enough? In life. In the things that go to make up who you are. In the things that you feel define you. Do you have enough?

That feeling of NOT having ‘enough’ drives an enormous amount of anxiety in our society, society which is richer in material possessions than any that has gone before us.

There is a list of things to think about which circulates around the internet. It usually reads something like this ...

If you have food in your fridge, clothes on your back, a roof over your head and a place to sleep you are richer than 75% of the world.

If you have money in the bank, your wallet, and some spare change you are among the top 8% of the world’s wealthy.

If you woke up this morning with more health than illness you are more blessed than the million people who will not survive this week.

If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the agony of imprisonment or torture, or the horrible pangs of starvation you are luckier than 500 million people alive and suffering.

If you can read this message you are more fortunate than 3 billion people in the world who cannot read it at all.

On most measures Australians come up at the top of the lists of the wealthiest, healthiest, most secure people in the world. We have a lot. We have more than enough, usually. When studying famine as a topic at university one of the startling facts, though I shouldn’t really have been surprised, was that there has never been a time in the history of the world that there has not been enough food. It is that those who have plenty choose not to share with those who have too little. Gordon Gecko and his ‘greed is good’ philosophy allows some people to die for the lack of what so many others hold as surplus in their hands.

So when is enough, enough? What do we need? Many of us will have been introduced to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, a pyramid building from the most basic needs of food and water, up through clothing, shelter, health care through to spiritual needs at the top. My experience in life and especially my experience of people living with very little materially, has been that neat diagrams and theories, such as that of Maslow, don’t fit all the time. Spiritual ‘needs’ are not the icing on the top to be given attention when every other need has been met. Waiting and focussing on our other needs first doesn’t actually lead to a rich, fulfilling, whole life.

The need for encounter with God and the sense of purpose and direction and meaning in life infuse all of the other levels of that hierarchy, that pyramid of needs. At the heart of the spiritual need is the need to know we are loved. As St John wrote, “God is love, and those who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.” (1 John 4:16). Being loved, knowing we are loved, gives us capacity and resilience to be able to face and deal with the struggles of other levels of our lives. If there is one thing I would like people to know as soon as they walk into this place it is this. *Know that you are loved!* Perhaps that needs to be a banner or painted over each entrance. ‘Know that you are loved! Welcome into God’s hug!’

Hannah, who we met again in the first reading (1 Samuel 1:4-20) and in her ‘song’ (1 Samuel 2:1-8) which we read as the psalm, was richly blessed in her life. She had more than many of her time. Her life was very privileged.

Yet she didn't have enough.

She would not have said 'when' to stop the flow because there was something seriously missing.

As we know, she wanted a child. She was being taunted for the lack of a child. Her heart ached for the space of what was not there in her life. While that was a specific and clear space that she described it seems to me that fundamentally Hannah felt that she was not loved. According to the story, her husband, Elkanah, showed his love by giving her things. Clearly he had only read one chapter of Gary Chapman's excellent book The Five Love Languages!

For those who haven't come across Chapman's book, he suggests that there are five 'languages' which speak love into our lives. Giving gifts IS one of them. But there are also positive words, spending time, serving one another and physical touch.

The narrative about the relationship between Elkanah and Hannah is not fully revealed here, but I think we could all think of people who think they have been showing love if they just show it in one of those five ways. Elkanah showed his love by giving gifts. That offering didn't speak to Hannah's heart. It wasn't that she was ungrateful. It was that the 'things' did not fill the space. They didn't even touch the sides! She wanted to know that she was loved and for that to be expressed through a child.

Hannah also saw herself as representative. It wasn't just about herself but she wanted encouragement for others in similar situations. Look at her song. It is not just about getting what she wanted. It is about people knowing that they are loved, cared for, noticed, important enough to be valued. It is a song which echoes through many people's lives. That same song was echoed in the Magnificat, the Song of Mary (Luke 1:46-55), the song which reflected not only God's love for Mary but for us all. Celebrating things we receive is great. Celebrating the way that we recognise that we are all blessed and loved, as represented in something which has touched our own lives, is a shared joy, a deeper celebration.

When we think about whether we have 'enough' part of that question is 'do we feel like we are loved enough?' At the heart of Hannah's response and her song, at the heart of the good news, at the heart of being here is the reaffirmation that we ARE loved, wanted, cared for, embraced, valued. In that strength we then can find resilience to face the ongoing challenges of life.

Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) famously wrote: "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you, O Lord". When is enough, enough? It is when our hearts find that peace of knowing we are loved. As Hannah did. As we are invited to find. Here.

Amen.

**Paul Mitchell**