

"Home! Sweet Home! Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home. Home. Sweet Home."

We all know how important it is to have home; I mean a family that loves us; as the weather gets cold I got to think of my mother and siblings back in Korea in the past few weeks. And I feel much better now because when I called my brother he said everyone was doing well.

Human beings are vulnerable; that's why we cannot live alone; we need family; everyone needs a home; there is no place like home.

Home is where you find peace; home is where you can rest; home is where you can get all the support you need.

But, what if our home is like hell?

Well, that's what we hear today from the Old Testament story.

According to this story, Hannah was married to this man, Elkanah, and he was really good to her. But Hannah was not the only wife; there was another wife and they lived together under the same roof.

Even though their culture was different from ours, it is not that hard to imagine what their life may have been like.

One time, I saw on TV; this Mormon man lived with two wives somewhere in the desert area of Arizona; and this guy was so mean to them and the two wives worked together to kick him out of the family. That was so funny.

It looks like anything is possible.

But in today's story, it was not the man; the other wife was the problem. The text says she had many children but Hannah had none.

We are talking about an ancient world

where having no children is not just about children;

it is more than that; it had to do with honor, power, and survival in society.

Then, what is the point?

The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary gives us two interesting insights on this text.

On one level, this is a little family drama. We hear this tension in the members of the family. And this woman, Hannah, shows a remarkable devotion to God.

Just put yourself in her situation.

I don’t think a divorce was an option for her in her time.

So she chose this option, the only option;
and that was to go to God.

Basically, she prayed; she prayed; and she prayed.

God was the only friend Hannah had.

But praying was even a challenge,

not because it was hard for her to consistently pray, like it would be for many of us,

but because even her priest did not seem to understand her,

let alone support and pray with her, at the beginning.

She was a lonely human being, mentally and spiritually.

She knew her husband loved him very much but no one really knew what she was going through. To her, life was literally hell.

So she decided; she was determined; she knew what she would do; she thought she would die in church while praying.

“God, you answer my prayer or you let me die here.”

Period!

And the text says, after all, she’s got baby Samuel.

What we hear from this text is this: God decides.

It is God, not a doctor nor anyone else, that determines.

And our text says not once but twice, “It is God who has closed Hannah’s womb.”

And eventually, it was also God who opened her womb.

God is the determining power.

God closes the door and God opens it again in life.

That is the first message.

But there is another level in this story.

The text says Hannah was barren; and chapter 3:1 says, “The word of the Lord” was rare in those days.

This is the time the Israel was going through a tough time; while the neighboring nations all had their kings, Israel did not have a king yet.

Let’s say we are technically in war; and the presidential election is still pending; there is no central figure who could lead the nation. It is a mess.

Hannah’s anxiety over having no children, even though she was loved by her husband, meant Israel’s anxiety over their having no king in spite of the love and care of God.

They were not sure about their future.

There were so many uncertainties in their lives.

And the taunting difficulty Hannah was going through was the difficulty the country was going through from their neighboring rival nations.

Their real question was: Can we survive? Do we have a future?

Can hope with the day in this challenging time?

What the text tells us is this:

Just as Hannah devoted her life, the country needs to devote itself to God. That is the first message.

Just as Hannah dedicated her son, Samuel, to God, they need to dedicate their future king of Israel to the Lord.

There is nothing else; God is in charge; God makes decisions; God hears the plea of His people; God will help His people get through.

All they need is come humbly before the Lord and dedicate their lives to Him. This is what this Old Testament text says.

We live in a challenging time. People are concerned about their future. We are surrounded by many enemies in our life situations.

We just had another circuit meeting last Thursday and many pastors were worried about the future of their churches; there was no single pastor who said everything was all right.

Can hope win the day? That is the question everyone had in their heart.

But I am not that worried; in fact, I am very positive and hopeful for our church.

Today is our annual conference day; as I was getting ready for today, I had some time for reflection on the year. God is good and we are blessed. We have this loving and caring congregation and the spirit is always warm and positive; I mean we are far better off than other churches in this area.

Let's have hope. It is God, nothing else, who decides. All we need is to trust Him and pray to Him and give ourselves to Him. Walk with Him and stay with Him. Certainly, hope will win our days. Amen.