

His Story, Our Stories – Hannah and Mary

AIMS AND OUTCOMES

Help participants understand that

- God's people experience hard times and have difficult experiences
- God uses seemingly insignificant people and places to continue his work in the world
- Emotions and experience have an important part to play in understanding our role as God's people
- Women have a central role in God's story, in biblical times and today

Background

In the time of the Temple in Jerusalem, it was common for prayers of thanksgiving to be sung aloud. Ritual, with literary structure and strong symbolism, such as Hannah's prayer is often referred to as a psalm or song. Since Hannah was heading to the Temple as she proclaimed this prayer, many traditions sing this song in advance to worship as preparation.

Hannah's song strongly parallel's the style and structure of Psalm 113, a song of thanksgiving that is accredited to David. The structure and style of songs of thanksgiving are somewhat formulaic in structure – they tend to begin with a word of praise, refer back to how God has acted on behalf of the people in creation in the past, and look to the future at how God will bring glory in the future. Such a structure was useful when used corporately, as it created natural breaks for call and response between the congregation and the cantor.

This structure for songs of thanksgiving is so strong that we see it repeated in numerous psalms, including Mary the mother of Jesus' psalm of thanksgiving at the annunciation. The similarities between Mary's song and Hannah's song are so strong that some scholars believe that Mary's song was an adaptation of the familiar song from Hannah.

RESOURCES

1. A copy of the picture 'Anguish' large enough for all to see. Use a projector and the Powerpoint slide or an copy printed at A2, or A4 copies for small groups.)
2. A number of Bibles or the verses printed out, enough for one between two.
3. Paper and pens
4. Post-it notes
5. Flip chart and pens

In advance, ask two people to prepare to read 1 Samuel 1:24 - 2:10 and Luke 1:46-55. Ask them to deliver their readings joyfully. They will be asked to read later in the activity.

1 Samuel

Divide the group into pairs and give a Bible to each pair. Ask them to read 1 Samuel 1:1 – 18 together.

1. One should then assume the role of Hannah and the other the role of Samuel.
2. Using the Bible passage as a guide, they should enact what they imagine the conversation would have been between Hannah and Samuel as they looked back over the events described in this passage. Encourage them to pay special attention to what they imagine were Hannah and Samuel's feelings about these events and how they related to God as he was at work through them.
3. Each pair could then discuss with other pairs the approach they took to the conversation and share how this passage relates to their own experience of trusting God to care for them as they play their part in his big plan.
4. Ask the groups to share some of their insights. Write up key words/phrases on the flip chart.
5. In the same groups talk about how Hannah might view herself as part of God's story.
6. Ask: 'Are we sometimes reluctant to pour out our hearts to God as Hannah did (1 Samuel 1:10; Psalm 62:8)? Is it that we don't want other people to hear? Or that we don't want to admit our need to God? Have a short time of reflection and invite them to tell God what they want and how they feel.

Luke

Divide the group back into pairs and give a Bible to each pair. Ask them to read Luke 1:26-38 together.

1. Read Luke 1:26-38. Ask what picture of Mary is painted in this passage.
2. Discuss in the same small groups the issues surrounding Mary emotionally, within her own family and culturally.
3. In small groups talk about how Mary might have viewed herself as part of God's story prior to this announcement and post the announcement. Come together to share thoughts.
4. Show the picture 'Anguish' (PP God's SG His Story, Our Story IMAGE.docx or Powerpoint slide from the AMD team) and spend a little while in silence, ask participants to consider times when life has been difficult for them. How did they respond? Now consider times when life has been difficult for them as a Church and Parish. How did they respond?
5. Discuss the following: thinking of Hannah and Mary, how might the responses of these two women help us in the future? Though our circumstances might sometimes make it difficult to see how on earth God is working out his plan in our lives, he invites us to trust him all the same. We need to recognise that sometimes our trust is expressed as desperate prayer rather than songs of joy.
6. Explain that each woman in turn responded to God with gratitude and praise. As we listen to the next readings consider your response to God's blessings. Ask the prepared readers to read 1 Samuel 1:24 - 2:10; followed by Luke 1:46-55
7. Ask participants to share words or phrases that stick out in their minds, write them onto the flip chart.



8. Now discuss together what you have discovered about God, his people and the journey we are on together. Discuss the links we see in the two stories with our own experiences in worship today.

You might like to finish this session with the following poem:

'I asked God for strength, that I might achieve.
I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.
I asked for health, that I might do greater things.
I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.
I asked for riches, that I might be happy.
I was given poverty, that I might be wise.
I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men.
I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.
I asked for all things that I might enjoy life, I was given life that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing that I asked for – but everything I had hoped for.
Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.
I am among all men, most richly blessed.'

(Anonymous Confederate soldier of the American Civil War)