

# Sermon

## “I Keep The Lord Always Before Me”

A Sermon for Cary Presbyterian Church

Sunday, November 14, 2021

25th Sunday after Pentecost

### Prayer for Illumination”

**Lord God, our refuge in the hour of darkness,  
a never failing bulwark in the time of trouble.**

**May we, for whom the boundary lines have fallen in pleasant places, keep you ever before our eyes. Give us such courage and strength born of our confidence in you, that though this world may seem always in peril, we can live boldly bearing witness to your love.**

**Today as we encounter your word in reading and proclamation, may we worship and pray with the passion and confidence of Hannah.**

**May we join the Psalmist in declaring,  
“You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.”**

**We ask it in the name of our Lord, Jesus. Amen.**

*1Sam. 1:4 On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; 5 but to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb. 6 Her rival used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. 7 So it went on year by year; as often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. 8 Her husband Elkanah said to her,*

*“Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?”*

*1Sam. 1:9 After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the LORD. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. 10 She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD, and wept bitterly. 11 She made this vow: “O LORD of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head.”*

*1Sam. 1:12 As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. 13 Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk. 14 So Eli said to her, “How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine.” 15 But Hannah answered, “No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD. 16 Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time.” 17 Then Eli answered, “Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him.” 18 And she said, “Let your servant find favor in your sight.” Then the woman went to her quarters, ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer.*

*1Sam. 1:19 They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD; then they went back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. 20 In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, “I have asked him of the LORD.”*

*Psalm 16:1 Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.  
2 I say to the LORD, “You are my Lord;  
I have no good apart from you.”*

*Psa. 16:3 As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble,  
in whom is all my delight.*

*Psa. 16:4 Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows;  
their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out  
or take their names upon my lips.*

*Psa. 16:5 The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;  
you hold my lot.*

*6 The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;  
I have a goodly heritage.*

*Psa. 16:7 I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;  
in the night also my heart instructs me.*

*8 I keep the LORD always before me;  
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.*

*Psa. 16:9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;  
my body also rests secure.*

*10 For you do not give me up to Sheol,  
or let your faithful one see the Pit.*

*Psa. 16:11 You show me the path of life.  
In your presence there is fullness of joy;  
in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

## **I. I am struck by the centrality of choosing in today's scripture.**

**A. Hannah chooses to go to the sanctuary and lay out her distress before the Lord — rather than continue in the self-defeating spiral of feeling helpless and put-upon.**

**1. She takes agency of her life, even if for no more than the choice to make her case before the Almighty and seek a blessing.**

## **B. The Psalmist chooses too:**

2 *I say to the LORD, “You are my Lord;  
I have no good apart from you.”*

### **And**

*Psa. 16:5 The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;  
you hold my lot.*

### **And**

8 *I keep the LORD always before me;  
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.*

## **C. Joshua knew that we must choose:**

*Josh. 24:15 Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”*

## **D. Jesus, too, reminded us that we can’t have it both ways.**

**1. We cannot serve two masters, we must choose.  
[Matt. 6:24, Luke 16:13]**

## **II. But we are such easily distracted people**

### **A. So much noise and haste!**

### **B. Nouwen’s drive through LA in 1970s**

*“Recently I was driving through Los Angeles, and suddenly I had the strange sensation of driving through a huge dictionary. Wherever I looked there were words trying to take my eyes from the road. They said, ‘Use me, take me, buy me, drink me, smell me, touch me, kiss me, sleep with me.’”*

Nouwen, Henri J. M.. *The Way of the Heart: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers* . HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

## **C. Peter Berger *et al* The Homeless Mind**

1. **Study of consciousness in the face a rapidly evolving technological society and a rapacious economy which dehumanizes.**
2. **We are in danger of losing touch with “home.”**
3. **The Psalmist on the other hand knows about home...**

6 *The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;  
I have a goodly heritage.*

**D. Robert Lifton — Psychic numbing**

1. **Research in the wake of Hiroshima nuclear bombing and later with service members returning from war...**
2. **Most cannot cope for long with awareness of these sorts of horrors so we practice psychic numbing in which we numb ourselves to hard realities. This often prevents us from taking action to address the problems.**

**III. Potential solutions to our numbed and distracted lives**

**A. Michael Fishbane — Sacred Attunement**

1. **We must recover practices which sustain our mindfulness in a mindless society.**

† **Prayer**

† **Worship where we sustain a narrative of hope**

† **Daily awareness of God**

**B. Mother Teresa of Calcutta as an alternative to psychic numbing:**

*“If I look at the mass I will never act. If I look at the one, I will.”*

1. **This is, in essence, the “small step” approach.**

**C. The move from distracted and mindless living to entering into the life which God dreams for us begins with returning our attention to the Lord.**

**1. For most of us this boils down to choosing again and again and again to direct our attention to the God from whom every blessing flows.**

2 *“You are my Lord;  
I have no good apart from you.”*

AND

11 *You show me the path of life.  
In your presence there is fullness of joy;  
in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

#### **IV. What choosing looks like:**

**A. For Hannah it was turning to the Lord in her distress — she takes her troubles and lays them out before the Almighty.**

**1. Psalm 70:1 has a prominent place is LOH**  
*“Oh Lord, come to my assistance.  
Oh Lord, make haste to help me!”*

**B. For the Psalmist**

8 *I keep the LORD always before me;  
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.*

† **Paraphrase — “my attention upon God will prevent me from being pushed around.”**

**C. Choosing *this* God means choosing a host of daily (hourly?) commitments.**

**1. What does God want?**

† **In short, a workable creation:**

- \* Care for planet — ecological choices
- \* Care for neighbors — justice & economics

**D. Other gods have other expectations . . . and our loyalty to other gods inevitably puts us in conflict with the demands of the Lord.**

4 *Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips.*

**V. To keep the Lord ever before us is easy to say, and not so easy to accomplish . . .**

- A. Therefore we gather regularly**
- B. We practice some form of daily prayer / devotion**
- C. We cultivate intentional habits of making time for God**
- D. We make the pilgrimage of our lives an intentional journey in the footsteps of the Lord whose disciples we claim to be.**
- E. We hold one another lovingly-accountable.**

**Perhaps we hear this list of disciplines and we think “Too much, you ask too much!” But keeping God at the center of life was no easier for Hannah and the Psalmist than it is for now today. They, too, had to find workable ways to avoid distraction and despair while cultivating the joy of a life lived with the Lord ever before them. We have their witness as both an encouragement and an invitation to follow in the way. May we do so to God’s glory.**

**Charge:**

**Mother Teresa “Spend one hour a day in adoration of your Lord . . .”**