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## *Hannah's Prayer: A Prayer of Trouble, Anxiety, and Frustration*

**A sermon by Canon Wallace Marsh**  
**Proper 28 – Year B**

*But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled...for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time."*

Hannah is deeply troubled and her life is full of anxiety and frustration.

If you are like me, trouble, anxiety and frustration might have been how you felt Friday evening as you learned about the events in Paris.

Hannah reminds us that life is full of trouble and anxiety. Jesus says a similar thing to the disciples in today's gospel. He says the temple will fall, nations will rise against nations, and there will be wars and famine (Mark 13:1-8).

Jesus wants the disciples to know that life will present them with trouble, anxiety, and frustration.

In his 1978, Dr. Scott Peck published a bestseller titled, *The Road Less Traveled*. The book begins with a memorable opening sentence: "Life is difficult." Peck says once you accept life is difficult you can start moving forward.

Hannah realizes that life is difficult. She is on a difficult road, one that some of you have walked, as she wrestles with infertility. Hannah's heart is broken and she is sad.

One of the things that became clear to me on Friday evening is we have a lot in common with Hannah—our lives are full of trouble and anxiety.

So, the question becomes, "How are we as Christians called to process and respond to life's difficulties?"

For example: How will we process and respond to the events in Paris? Will we allow these events to eat at our soul and diminish our spirit of hope and joy? Will we allow radical extremists to create so much anxiety and fear that we forget those holy words of scripture—"Fear not"? Will we allow our global and national climate to become so divisive we perpetuate a state of infertility instead of conceiving new possibilities?

What do we do when we find ourselves troubled, anxious, and frustrated? How do we move forward when life presents us with difficulties?

Let's look at what Hannah does when she finds herself in a difficult place. Hannah is moved to prayer. Notice that Hannah is moved to a prayer that is so deep the priest Eli, the one whose job it is to pray, accuses Hannah of being drunk; it shows what Eli knows about the depth of prayer.

So, the first move that we should make with our trouble, anxiety, and frustration is to allow it to become our prayer.

Notice when Hannah is praying her mouth is moving but no words are being spoken. St. Paul told the Romans even when there are no words for prayer, even when you are so frustrated and anxious that you can't voice what is going on deep in your soul, realize the spirit is praying in you with sighs too deep for words (Romans 8:26).

Hannah's ability to take her difficulties into prayer is also something we see in Jesus.

Notice how similar Hannah's prayer is to Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane.

You know the story: Jesus is about to be denied, he knows that suffering and death are in his immediate future. He is deeply troubled and agitated, and goes to the garden to pray. Jesus' troubles lead him into a prayer that is so intense that Luke's gospel says his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground (Luke 22:44).

Some theologians believe that when Jesus was praying in the garden he was at his most vulnerable. I believe that is true.

You see that is what prayer does, it exposes the depth of our anxiety and trouble and takes us to a place of vulnerability. That is why Thomas Merton once told a group of nuns "that it is a scary thing to pray." Why? Because prayer exposes our vulnerability.

The prayers of Hannah and Jesus, and even our own prayers, can be places of vulnerability. But here is the good news: "Vulnerability is the birthplace of innovation, creativity, and change," says the author Brene Brown.

And if that is true, if prayer is a place of vulnerability, then prayer will ultimately lead us to a place of innovation, creativity, and change.

That means no matter how dark this world becomes (as it did in Paris this weekend) the words of St. John will always ring true: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

Prayer has the ability to move us from darkness to light. Prayer has the ability to move us from a place of infertility to place where we can conceive new life.

When Hannah's prayer concludes, the scripture says that she was no longer sad. As a matter of fact, she was able to go home to eat and drink with her husband...and conceive a child.

When Jesus' prayer concludes in the garden, he is at a different place, determined to walk the way of the cross...and the cross becomes what? The cross becomes a place of consummation...a place where Christ consummates new life for humankind.

Prayer has the ability to move us into new life. Rowan Williams writes, in prayer "your vision is clarified; your actions are gradually disciplined; the divine life slowly transforms you...prayer is the life of Jesus coming alive in you."

So, this past Friday night, when I and many of you felt troubled, disturbed and anxious because of the evil that occurred in Paris, it moved me to see so many people turning to prayer on social media.

I pray that those prayers draw us deeper into Hannah's prayer, into a prayer where God transforms our troubled and anxious hearts to a place where we can experience the hope of new life!

Let us pray: O God of peace, you have taught us that in returning and rest we will be saved, in quietness and confidence will be our strength: By the might of your Spirit lift us, we pray, to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God; through Jesus Christ our Lord (BCP, 832).