

Sermon Text for May 11, 2025

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

I Samuel 1:12-18, Acts 1:14

“The power of prayer”

Happy Mother’s Day to all of you. Today we celebrate the role that women play in our lives but more specifically today we will be focusing on the role that women play in the life of the church. Before we get to our Scripture I want to see who is the most blessed out of all of us. If you have a mother who is still living and is over 80 years old stand up. Okay, now if she is over 85 years old stay standing, the rest of you sit down. If you have a mom who is 90 stay standing. We declare you the most blessed today on this Mother’s Day, congratulations!

I grew up with a strong mother and an even stronger grandmother on my mom’s side. She graduated from Smith College and my mom from Columbia Teacher’s college in New York, as well as Princeton Theological Seminary. I remember seeing my mom praying for her four boys constantly, maybe she was praying for herself and her survival, but it seemed like to me that she was praying for us. So I grew up with a strong, purposeful women in my life.

This past week the world was in attendance as the Roman Catholic Church elected its first American pope. It is a church with over a billion members worldwide. And yet women within the church continue to play a role that is not complete or full, but rather secondary to that of men. I was on a similar journey when I was younger and before I was ordained as a pastor. I was convinced early on in my journey that women should not be ordained, but then I read about Deborah and how God had put her in charge of all of Israel and that she was a spiritual leader to them as well. I read about Junias, who in Romans 16:7 is described by Paul as one of the more excellent apostles, a woman.

I realized that I was wrong. Today, here at First Presbyterian church women in leadership is the norm, not the exception. Out of our 11 elders we have 8 women and 3 men. Out of our 14 deacons we have 11 women and 3 men. Here Mother’s Day and the celebration of women in ministry is not a once a year event, it is our way of life. It is simply the way we do things. It is who we are. Let’s read about the early church and see how this was also true of them as well.

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When we served as missionaries in Russia we would often go to the Russian Orthodox Churches for services. They were beautiful and enchanting. The choirs would sing acappella, and the priests were always dressed in their most ornate robes. There was only male leadership,

but the churches were packed with babushkas, which is the Russian word for widows. I would say that probably the ration was at least 10-1 female to male. We had a member of our church in Russia who when her daughter was born during the communist times the state did not want the people from the city to baptize their children, if they were from the country that was okay, but not city folk.

So she had to dress up as a person from the country, disguise herself and her child in order to go into the church and baptize her baby in the Orthodox Church. The extent to which mother's will go to ensure their faith is passed down to their children is amazing. We saw it first hand in Russia. We see it first hand here in I Samuel as well. Hannah is a mother who was barren and living with her husband who had other wives who were not barren, and so she is feeling like a second class citizen. We find her in the synagogue praying that the Lord would bless her to have children.

She is so focused on her prayer, she is so intent on what she is doing, sending her petition to the Lord, that she doesn't notice that the rabbi is watching her lips move and no sound coming out and so he thinks that she is drunk. Figures, a woman would have seen her and thought, oh, she must be praying, the rabbi looks at her and thinks she is drunk. In fact, when he confronts her she says, and this is at the center of what we are talking about today, look at vs.15: I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. I am guessing that if you are mom who has children you know exactly what it feels like to pour your soul out before the Lord in prayer, and that you have done it numerous times in the life of your child.

This act of pouring out your soul before the Lord ought to be the norm for us around here, not just for our children, but for all matter of life. Hannah here represents the women of the church who pray for change in the lives of their children, change in their marriage, change in their health and healing, change for more compassion and justice and righteousness. We have a prayer chain in this church and anyone can sign up and be a part of it. When we have an emergent need for prayer we call the people on the list and they promise to pray for whatever it is that we put before them. It is composed of 14 women and zero men. It isn't a women's prayer chain, but it has become one.

Let's be clear, this is a sermon to commend the women for their ongoing important work that they do in this church, but maybe it is also a bit of a scolding, an eye opening opportunity for the men of this church to pull your weight around here in prayer and leadership as well.

When we get to the Acts Scripture we find described once again the power of prayer as seen in the life of women as well. Having grown up with 4 boys, I know it must have been tough

on my mom. The first two boys were fairly calm, but my brother John and I were not so much. We would get into fights, physical fights with each other that would leave us bruised and my mom exasperated. One time when we got into it my mom intervened, grabbed both of our hands and bowed her head and said out loud let's pray. I mean it worked, we didn't know what to do, so we laughed as she prayed. But that was all she knew to do at the time. Sometimes that is all we have at our disposal, but it is always enough when we do.

How often do we find ourselves in the midst of all that is happening and just praying feels like the only thing we are able to do, it is all that is left. In this day and age I know that many of you have been praying for safety, you have been praying for protection for loved ones, you have been praying for change, you have been praying for righteousness to be revealed. There are times when we feel so helpless that praying is all that is left. That is what Hannah felt, and so she prayed. That is what the women in Acts felt, and so they prayed.

We find the disciples all gathered along with the women in a period of waiting and being uncertain as to what comes next. Without a shadow of a doubt they were afraid. This is the pre-Pentecost time when there is no sense of fulfillment that is present but rather those pressing questions of now what? Now that Jesus is no longer here who is in charge and what are we supposed to do? They were in a season of waiting to see what their next step would be and who would be leading that next step.

But their waiting was filled with prayer, as Hannah's was as she was waiting as well. It was active prayer. We read in Isaiah 40:31 that those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength. They were in the process of renewing their strength through prayer. That is our call as well, as we may find ourselves in a period of waiting and wondering what comes next, or not seeing God at work and wondering when God is going to work, instead of forcing things on our own, this time of waiting in prayer is crucial.

But we are not wired to wait. In this day and age our way of life is to go and fill our schedules, our kids have so many activities that our days are full, we are busy, and there is no time to wait. I have often said this in the past but do you know what we never see in Jesus? We never see him in a hurry. The ability to wait actively in prayer is something that we need to reclaim and I believe the women of this church are able to teach us something about this, just as the women of Scripture were able to teach us about it.

Hannah was desperate for what would come next, but she waited in prayer. Many of us are wanting to see God at work in our lives and around us. We want to see God change our children to more closely reflect His desire in their life, so we wait and pray. We want to see our

health changed and no more questions or pain, and so we wait and pray. We want to see our country changed to more reflect the righteousness of Matthew 25, so we wait and pray. My guess is that we spend more time worrying about things than we do praying about things.

So on this Mother's Day as we celebrate the women leaders of this church, we recognize the leadership that is currently the say of things in this church. We hear the words of Paul to his young mentee in Timothy who tells him: "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and now, I am sure, lives in you." This is the legacy that we claim and that we look to further. May God bless us and keep us as we recognize the power of prayer as it is lived out by the women of this church. Amen.