

A little later in the service we will admit a number of children to Holy Communion. Following their admission they will be able to join with us in receiving Holy Communion whenever we are together for worship.

Today therefore is a special day for them and for us because once they are admitted we will have a larger group of people eligible to participate fully in the worshipping life of the Anglican Church at large and in this parish in particular.

Our purpose in gathering together is to worship God. We do so as people who sometimes say and do things that we would rather we hadn't; things that hurt and or disappoint other people.

That's why at the beginning of our time together we say the prayer of preparation:

“Almighty God.....cleanse the thoughts of our hearts” etc. We then listen to the bible readings because God speaks to us through the writings we find there.

This morning we listened to a story from the Old Testament. The bible is divided into two main sections. One section contains the writings that record the thinking and the events of the people of God from the beginning of time through until about the time Jesus was born. That period of history is referred to as BC or Before Christ.

We listened to the story about Hannah being bullied. Many in our world today know all about bullying. People are ridiculed for the way they dress, the way they look, what they eat, the car their folk drive, the way their parents dress, speak or look and so on.

Bullying is designed to make the bully feel good about themselves. Bullies try to inflate their self-esteem by tearing down others. Hannah's rival thought that she was superior because she had been able to conceive a child whereas Hannah had not.

It was a cruel thing that she did and it caused Hannah much heartache. So much so that she was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord.

The outcome of the story was that Hannah's prayer was heard and she had a son. Her son was named Samuel and he became a very important person.

Listening to stories such as Hannah's story remind us that we can sometimes say things that cause others a great deal of hurt. It also reminds us that if we have been hurt by the

things others have said, or the way they have treated us, that we like Hannah can take that hurt to God in our prayers.

Just as we can tear people down the New Testament reading from the letter to the Hebrews suggests that we can build people up. The New Testament is the other section of the bible. It records events from the beginning of the common era starting some 2015 years ago until about the early one hundreds.

It consists of four gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Gospels are stories of special significance. They tell us about God's presence in the world in the person of Jesus and that makes them really, really special.

The New Testament also contains the story of Jesus' followers. This is called the Acts of

the Apostles or Acts for short. It also contains a number of letters that some of Jesus followers wrote to one another.

Before texting, facebook and other social media people used to write to one another on pieces of bark, parchment and more recently on paper. We're not too sure who wrote this letter but we do know that it was written to the Hebrews; that is to the people of Israel.

What the writer encouraged people to do was "to provoke one another to love and good deeds". Isn't that a wonderful thought? There are lots of times in life when it would be good to be provoked to love and good deeds.

I can remember a number of occasions in my life when others have said things to me that

have caused me to seriously examine my life and have inspired me to become a more caring, generous, open person able to respond to others in a more loving way.

This ability to provoke one another to love and good deeds; is part of the reason that we gather together as the people of God. As well as our primary focus of worshipping God it is in the fellowship of the Christian community that we can and do encourage one another.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews felt that gathering together was important. He encouraged his readers to "not" neglect "to meet together" but encouraged them to do so. If we are to be serious about following Jesus and trying to live our lives as Jesus

would have us do that, then most of us need all the encouragement we can get.

That is why we gather together as often as we are able. Some of us make Sunday worship a priority. Some even attend worship during the week.

Those of you who are being admitted to Holy Communion are an encouragement to the rest of us. Your desire to receive the sacrament reminds us how important the sacrament is in our lives. We hope and pray that our presence is an encouragement to you.

As well as being a time of encouragement our worship provides us with the opportunity to listen to some of Jesus' story. In this morning's reading from Mark's gospel

Jesus warns his followers about putting their trust in the things of this life.

One of the disciples was impressed by the size of the stones used in a building. The implication was that the building was very stable and would last for a very long time.

Jesus said that not one stone of the building would be left on another. People sometimes say that something is as safe as houses. We can place a great deal of faith in the things we have created such as the houses we live in, the cities we have built, the clever toys we fill much of our time with.

What Jesus said to the disciples should resonate in our ears because what he said is that there is nothing in this world that cannot be destroyed. We only need to look at the effects of our summer storms,

cyclones, earthquakes, tsunamis, fire and flood to realize how fragile our world really is.

So what Jesus was saying is that if we put our trust in the physical world: the pursuit of things we possess, be they houses, cars, toys, money: we might find that our trust misplaced.

Jesus says that there will be people who are so convinced that what Jesus had to say is not right. That if we seek to follow him. We will find ourselves being ridiculed for our faith, in the same way that Hannah was ridiculed for her belief that she could conceive a child.

Those who profess Jesus and want to walk in his footsteps may well be provoked by others. Should that occur we are reminded

that Jesus told the disciples that the Holy Spirit would support them in whatever situation they found themselves. We can take comfort from that.

After we listen to the readings and reflect on what they have to say to us we pray for the world, ourselves and for others. We remember Jesus last meal with his disciples and his commission that the disciples share in receiving Holy Communion. That is exactly what we, as disciples of Jesus, are doing.

So we and the young people we will admit to Holy Communion this morning join in worship; listen to and reflect on the scriptures and participate in walking in the footsteps of Jesus by receiving Holy Communion as often as we are able.