

## **60<sup>th</sup> Christian Women's Scottish Convention.**

**Held in the Atholl Centre Pitlochry 23<sup>rd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> March 2012**

It was my pleasure to attend the Convention this year for the first time. The main speaker was the Rev Ruth Crofton from Durham who gave us a great deal to think about. Her subject was families of Biblical times and today.

First session: Husband, wife and child.

Ruth took the story of Hannah in Samuel. We know of the misery Hannah felt because of her inability to give Elkanah a child. Ruth suggests that Penninah, the second wife who was certainly second in Elkanah's affections was constantly sniping at Hannah because of this. In other words much of Hannah's misery was caused by Elkanah himself.

When Hannah went to the temple and was taken aside by the old priest (who was not noted for his patience at that stage of his life) and upbraided for being drunk, he listened to her story then told her to go home, that she was blest. After being given that assurance from Eli, her feelings of being punished by God were lifted and she went home happy. Soon she was rewarded with her son.

Childlessness today can still be regarded as a stigma. If that condition is by choice there is, too, a certain disapproving attitude. As in Biblical times it is the duty of a wife to bear children

After 'huddle' session to discuss the subject we came to the conclusion that we see ourselves as failures, like Hannah, because we have no (or few) children in our churches. Yet we are blessed. We have so much in our church communities to be thankful for and should stop obsessing about what we don't have.

Second session. A Confusion of Children.

We began by looking at 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel ch 11 reading about David.

David certainly had a complicated family, having many sons by many wives and certainly one daughter. In today's society we do have some complicated families: Two parents, a mum and a dad; two mums; two dads. Single parents; multiple marriages with combined families and how we all fit together.

David had forgotten some of his morality as he got older and lusted after the wife of Uriah the Hittite. We read of the devious ways he tried to be rid of Uriah so that he could marry his widow, Bathsheba. Sufficient to say here, the Lord was rather upset at him, punished him and David had a fit of repentance.

Following in his father's footsteps in a way Amnon, his son, took a fancy to Tamar his half sister, full sister of Absalom. He, too, used very devious means to get Tamar to his bed chamber, where he raped her then just cast her aside. Absalom was furious and vowed to get even with his half brother. He bided his time and eventually killed him. Where was David in all this? He certainly did nothing to punish Amnon for what he did to Tamar, but when Absalom killed Amnon, he banished Absalom. Sons were more important than daughters, they were valued very highly.

We discussed the possibility that sons are still valued just that bit more. Similarly in church we greet the arrival of a new man as office-bearer material.

We can also equate the confusion of children with complicated relationships, falling outs and building or changing alliances with the church in general. Relating all of this to our Radical Welcome programme and our striving for ecumenicism, we cannot afford to

have our churches and denominations squabbling among ourselves, having favourites or just banishing others. Surely it is not beyond us to work in harmony, to give and take and work together towards the Kingdom of God. After all, we all have the same Father in Heaven regardless of which name we give Him.

Session 3. Enter the family friend.

We all need friends. King David needed his famous fighting men. Of these Joab became the leader of the army. He was not nice character: he had a very long memory for wrongs done and was not afraid to organize assassinations. E.g. Uriah the Hittite.

He was, however, a good friend to David and solved many a problem for him. He was a 'fixer' and his name crops up throughout the story of David. (look for him)

Friends can often be candid with us, can tell us things our family can't or daren't. It can be difficult to have friends like this in churches because it isn't easy to receive what could be called straight talking.

We wondered if the Reformed Churches have more of a tradition of saying to the minister, "You're wrong." BUT don't come on like an exocet missile under the Any Other Competent Business slot

David responded emotionally to situations: Joab was a no nonsense character. The two don't always get on together because they cannot always see the other's point of view. It is what we feel versus what we think.

Hence Jesus had such a mixed bunch of friends. They had different gifts and they had different viewpoints. There were the hot heads, the go-ahead types and the ones taking time to think.

In summary Ruth suggested that the bit players in the Old Testament, like Joab aren't the stars of the show but they have great influence.

We, too are the bit players in our churches. We are not star players but we are recognised, known and needed by God. We are the bit players making a difference to our families our churches and to the world

**Final act of worship.**

The Convention ended with a Service of Communion led by Mrs Audrey Sharpe.

Reported by Cathie Corner.

URC Hamilton.