

Talk at Open Door Service on Sunday 1st February 2026

Scripture:

Hebrews 4:14-16

1 Samuel 1:9 - 18 (The Story of Hannah)

A Throne of Mercy and Grace

When we hear the word *throne*, most of us already carry an image with us. A throne suggests power, authority, distance. It is a place approached carefully, if at all. Thrones are where decisions are made about people, not usually where people come to rest.

And yet the writer to the Hebrews takes that word and quietly refuses to let it mean what we expect.

Instead of judgement, we hear mercy.

Instead of fear, grace.

Instead of distance, an invitation.

“Let us approach the throne of grace with boldness,” the writer says, “so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

This is not the language of performance. It is the language of welcome. For some of us, the barrier is not fear but confidence - the sense that we already know how to do faith, how to pray, how to manage God. And confidence, just as much as shame, can stop us approaching honestly.

Hebrews is not written to confident believers riding high, secure in their faith and certain of their future. It is written to people who are tired. People who are discouraged. People who are still believing, but only just. People who are tempted not to rebel, but simply to drift away quietly.

The letter does not scold them. It steadies them. And at the centre of that steadiness is a claim about Jesus - not just about what he has done, but about what he is like.

“We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses.”

That sentence matters more than we sometimes realise, because it does not say that Jesus merely tolerates weakness, or puts up with it, or overlooks it. It says he understands it - from the inside.

This can't be a distant compassion. It is not theoretical sympathy. Jesus knows fear, exhaustion, misunderstanding, temptation, disappointment, grief. He knows what it is to pray and not see the answer arrive straight away. He knows what it is to be faithful and still suffer.

And because of that, the writer dares to say something extraordinary: when you come to God, you do not come to someone who is surprised by you. You do not have to tidy yourself up first. You do not have to find the right words. You do not have to pretend to be stronger than you are. Sometimes the barrier is the version of ourselves we've learned to present - the capable one, the faithful one, the one who is coping. And that version can quietly stand between us and grace.

The throne you approach is not a place of exposure, but a place of help. If that sounds abstract, the story of Hannah makes it real.

Hannah does not come to the temple composed and confident. She comes deeply distressed. She prays silently - her lips moving, but no sound coming out. Of course, the religious authority in the room gets it wrong - Eli assumes she is drunk.

That detail matters as it reminds us that even religious spaces can misunderstand pain, and once that happens, many of us learn to place the

barrier ourselves - to hold back, to edit our prayers, to decide what is acceptable to bring before God.

Hannah is not praised for her devotion, she is misread, misjudged, and almost dismissed.

And yet God is not offended by her prayer.

Hannah does not offer polished language. She does not manage her emotions. She does not pray in a way that looks impressive or controlled. She simply pours out her soul.

“I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord.”

It is one of the most honest descriptions of prayer in the whole of Scripture. Not composing. Not performing. Pouring: and the remarkable thing is not that Hannah's circumstances immediately change - they do not.

The remarkable thing is that she leaves changed. The text tells us that her countenance was sad no longer. She has not yet received what she longs for, but she has been heard. She has come into the presence of God, and that presence has been enough to steady her for what comes next.

This is what Hebrews is talking about: The throne of grace is not a vending machine for answered prayers. It is a place where weary people are met with mercy. The promise is not that everything will be fixed immediately. The promise is that you will not be turned away.

Hebrews tells us that at this throne we receive mercy, and grace to help in time of need. Mercy looks back - it meets us where we are. Grace looks forward - it helps us take the next step. Sometimes that step is very small. Sometimes it is simply the strength to keep going. Sometimes it is the courage to pray honestly again. Sometimes it is permission to stop pretending.

Boldness, in Hebrews, does not mean confidence. It means trust. Trust that God's character is kinder than our fears suggest. Trust that weakness is not a barrier to prayer, but the very place where grace meets us.

Many people drift away from faith not through rebellion, but through exhaustion. They do not stop believing. They stop approaching. Hebrews gently, firmly says: draw near. Not because you feel worthy, but because Jesus has already drawn near to you.

The throne is not guarded against you. It is held open for you.

And so today the invitation is simple, and quietly demanding. Not to try harder. Not to believe more fiercely. Not to tidy up your inner life. But to come honestly. To approach a throne that does not shame, but shelters. A throne where mercy is not rationed, and grace arrives in time of need - not in time of strength.