

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
 "Hannah"

Scripture: 1 Samuel 1:4-20, 1 Samuel 2:1-10

Hymns: Oh worship the King 313 (1,2,4), What a friend we have in Jesus 746, O God, our help in ages past 330 (1,2,4,6),

Choruses: You are my king, You are my all in all, Give thanks

April 29, 2018

Rev. Steve Filyk

You've been trying to get pregnant for five years.

You've written the entrance exam three times.

You've been waiting a decade

For your daughter to return your call, your letters.

You've been watching your church decline for thirty years.

What do we do when we are in desperate situations?

When the things we long for—

for a child, for a career, for reconciliation, for renewal—
 seem to be constantly out of reach.

Sometimes we deny that there is a problem.

We pretend that it doesn't really matter.

"Oh, I never really wanted to be a fireman anyways."

Sometimes we get bitter and angry.

We blame ourselves or we blame others.

"It's her fault, her pride and stubbornness,
 That have robbed me of my joy."

Sometimes we deny that there is a problem.

Sometimes we become bitter and angry

And sometimes we bring our concerns to God...

PAUSE

Over the next couple months,
we will be doing some character studies.

We will be peering into the lives
Of the men and women,
the saints and sinners,
We encountered in Holy Scripture.

Two weeks ago we met Jonah.
Today we encounter Hannah.

Hannah is a woman of Israel who lives in a plural marriage.
This may sound strange to us,
But it was not uncommon for her culture and era.

While Hannah is loved, even favored by her husband Elkanah,
Hannah is unhappy.

For unlike her husband's prolific partner, Peninnah,
Hannah has no children to call her own.

And as one commentator notes,
"It was a terrible fate to be barren in a patriarchal world.

It was bad enough if one were the only wife;
Lack of children, after all,
could be the fault of the husband.

But for Hannah the taunts and false pity
 Would have been unbearable.”ⁱ

Childless Hannah is mistreated.
 Childless Hannah feels overlooked.
 Childless Hannah has no hope for the future.

Of course, this isn’t just a story about Hannah.
 Hannah is Israel in microcosm.

After escaping Egypt,
 And wandering in the wilderness
 Israel made it to their final destination: the Promised Land.

While they have arrived, their place in the land remains tenuous.
 They failed to conquer the others inhabitants.
 And though God provides them with a series of leaders,
 The nation quickly skids
 into a “downward moral and religious spiral”.ⁱⁱ

The book of Judges ends on an ominous note,
 saying “In those days there was no king in Israel;
 All the people did what was right in their own eyes.”ⁱⁱⁱ
 They all did what they saw fit!

Israel is also victimised.
 Israel also feels abandoned.
 Like Hannah, the nation seems hopeless.

But today, in our reading,
 Hannah has had enough of her situation.

She refuses to mask her disappointment, saying
 “I don’t want kids.
 Who wants to change diapers anyways”.^{iv}

She refuses to accept this situation as her fate, thinking
 “I guess God doesn’t want me to be a parent.”

Instead of denying the issue or embracing resignation
 Hannah takes advantage of her family’s annual pilgrimage to Shilo
 And goes to the tabernacle to pray.

(She takes her anguish, anger, and disappointment to God.)

While she is there a priest walks in on her praying.
 He thinks she is drunk,
 and berates her for being intoxicated.

She boldly corrects him
 Saying between tears and sniffles
 that she has been pouring her heart out to God.

He doesn’t apologise
 but sends her on her way in peace,
 Offering her a blessing.

And by the grace of God
 The woman who has just been weeping
 Has her spirits lifted and restored.

Hannah hasn't received what she's asked for.
 But she's able to leave her concern with God
 And walk away in peace.

Hannah returns home when the pilgrimage is over.
 And we are told that: "the Lord remembered her".^v

The Lord remembered her and her womb is opened.
 She conceives and gives birth to a son,
 Whom she names him Samuel,
 Which means: "God has heard".^{vi}

Now for someone who has struggled for years like Hannah,
 This gift is truly staggering.
 The only way she can express her joy
 Is to burst into song.

Let me read from Peterson's translation:

"I'm bursting with God-news!
 I'm walking on air.
 I'm laughing at my rivals.
 I'm dancing my salvation.
 Nothing and no one is holy like God,
 no rock mountain like our God.
 Don't dare talk pretentiously—
 not a word of boasting, ever!
 For God knows what's going on.
 He takes the measure of everything that happens.
 The weapons of the strong are smashed to pieces,
 while the weak are infused with fresh strength.

The well-fed are out begging in the streets for crusts,
 while the hungry are getting second helpings.
 The barren woman has a houseful of children,
 while the mother of many is bereft.^{vii}

You may be interested to learn
 That this song of Hannah, this psalm,
 Is understood to be a psalm of “national thanksgiving”.^{viii}

For the song speaks of the arrival,
 Not just of a longed-for child,
 But of a king who will reign in God’s power.

Those familiar with the story
 Will recall that Hannah’s son will be a mighty prophet.
 And he will usher in the era of Israel’s kings.

What a story.
 A barren woman becomes
 God’s instrument to create a future for a hopeless nation.

Bible commentator Walter Brueggemann notes how
 “Israel’s new life emerges out of barrenness by the power of God.”

He adds that this: “power is evoked, summoned,
 and triggered lowly Hannah,
 who had no virtue, no claim, no capacity,
 only a stubborn insistence addressed to Yahweh
 and a readiness to yield back all good gifts.”^{ix}

So how does Hannah and her story speak to our story?

It would seem pretty simple.

If the Lord will remember Hannah,
Will remember Israel,
Won't the Lord also remember us?

PAUSE

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You've been waiting a decade

For your daughter to return your call, your letters.

You've been watching your church decline for thirty years.

So will you accept that fate?

Will you pretend there is no problem?

Or will you join Hannah?

Pour out your heart to the Lord

And entrust God to create a new future?

PAUSE

Today I've changed the order of service.

The only way to respond to the story of Hannah
Is to follow her example and pray.

In your bulletins you will find a slip of paper
That invites you to name that one issue, one concern,
That has been a source of heart-ache in your life.

It could be an estranged relationship...
It could be a thwarted ambition...
It could be a health problem...

Name that issue and write it down.

You don't have to include ***your*** name
Or reveal anything that will identify you or others.

I want you to fill out the paper,
And when you are finished, to get out of your seat
And bring your petition forward
Placing it in the offering plates on the communion table.

If you find it hard to get out of the pew
Just ask your neighbor to do it for you.

For our prayers of the people this morning
I will name aloud these issues
That you have written down.

We will bring them before God,
Trusting that God is able to create a new future
Where at the moment there is only barrenness.

Let's pray...

ⁱ John C. Holbert “Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B; 1 Samuel 1:4-10” *The Lectionary Commentary: the Old Testament and Acts*, 166

ⁱⁱ see notes *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* 3rd edition, Michael D. Coogan editor, 353 (Hebrew Bible)

ⁱⁱⁱ Judges 21:25 NRSV

^{iv} Play on imagery from Jim Cymbala “The Power of Desperate Prayer” November 8, 2014 www.faithgateway.com/power-desperate-prayer/#.WAFao5Mrlyk

^v 1 Samuel 1:20 NIV

^{vi} “Samuel (name)” *Wikipedia*

^{vii} 1 Samuel 2:1-5 MSG

^{viii} see notes *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* 3rd edition, Michael D. Coogan editor, 401 (Hebrew Bible)

^{ix} Walter Brueggemann *First and Second Samuel* 15