

OCT 18 2020 ... START HERE ...



Prepare for our time together from afar

- Find a quiet and comfortable space
- Turn on some soothing instrumental music, maybe with headphones
- Consider the stillness of a lit candle
- Take 3 deep breaths and calm your mind



Pray as you are comfortable – read silently, say out loud, whisper

God, guide me through the day
God remind me of Christ's presence
Under me, over me
On my right and on my left
God, breathe in and through me

May it be so.

TIME FOR THE ANCIENT STORY

Read silently or aloud – let these ancient words tap into your imagination.

Here's the backstory for today's story :

Golden calves and missing leaders is where we took a break last week. A lot of time has passed and a lot of things have happened since the golden calf. Rather than try to note every single thing, let me highlight the big stuff that gets us to today's scene.

Moses and the people wander in the desert. At the time they cross the Jordan River back to Abraham's ancient home, Moses dies and a new leader rises, Joshua. Over time, the descendants of Jacob's twelve sons become tribes. And they fight and they make up and they each take their own chunk of land in what we now call Israel and Palestine.

They had no leader – only judges who handled both religious squabbles and worship as well as legal issues. Not every tribe had a judge and not every judge was good. And the priests weren't always concerned with the ways of the LORD.

Hannah hasn't been able to have children, especially a son – for that is the only way women had worth back then. She is distressed. She and her husband (and his other wife and their kids) are at the main temple of the LORD at Shiloh, making their annual visit to worship and bring their offerings to God.

Now for the ancient story ...

One time, after eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah got up and presented herself before the LORD. (Now Eli the priest was sitting in the chair by the doorpost of the LORD's temple.) Hannah was very upset and couldn't stop crying as she prayed to the LORD. Then she made this promise: "LORD of heavenly forces, just look at your servant's pain and remember me! Don't forget your servant! Give her a boy! Then I'll give him to the LORD for his entire life. No razor will ever touch his head.

They got up early the next morning and worshipped the LORD. Then they went back home to Ramah. Elkanah had sex with his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. So in the course of time, Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, which means "I asked the LORD for him."

Then Hannah prayed:

My heart rejoices in the LORD.

My strength rises up in the LORD!

My mouth mocks my enemies

because I rejoice in your deliverance.

No one is holy like the LORD—

no, no one except you!

There is no rock like our God!

Don't go on and on, talking so proudly,

spouting arrogance from your mouth,

because the LORD is the God who knows,

and he weighs every act.

The bows of mighty warriors are shattered,

but those who were stumbling now dress themselves in power!

Those who were filled full now sell themselves for bread,

but the ones who were starving are now fat from food!

The woman who was barren has birthed seven children,

but the mother with many sons has lost them all!

The LORD!

He brings death, gives life,

takes down to the grave, and raises up!

The LORD!

He makes poor, gives wealth,

brings low, but also lifts up high!

God raises the poor from the dust,

lifts up the needy from the garbage pile.

God sits them with officials,

gives them the seat of honor!
The pillars of the earth belong to the LORD;
he set the world on top of them!
God guards the feet of his faithful ones,
but the wicked die in darkness
because no one succeeds by strength alone.
The LORD!
His enemies are terrified!
God thunders against them from heaven!
The LORD!
He judges the far corners of the earth!
May God give strength to his king
and raise high the strength of his anointed one.

You might want to read all of chapter 1 to get to know Hannah and her situation ...

- 1 Samuel 1:9-11, 19-20 and 2:1-10 CEB

SO WHAT NOW?

Read silently or aloud – some thoughts on this story

At the high school where I teach, we are wrapping up a week off – fall break. After nine whirlwind weeks of teaching Algebra 1 online, I took some time to reflect on how my students are doing, what they need, what I can do differently, and what is completely out of our control.

COVID-19 has caused all kinds of problems for my students, their families, myself and my teacher friends, and the community where I live. Most of all as a teacher, I see how COVID is affecting the education my students need and how their families are able to support them.

And there's not much I can do – I can't wave a magic wand and make COVID disappear. I also can't make the poverty that hurts many families in my school disappear. We have 57 homeless students and I can't fix that either. I catch myself getting stuck on trying to fix and control what I can't – because shouldn't everyone have what they need and be safe, protected, fed, clothed and happy?

In our story today, Hannah has everything she needs but a baby son. And she is miserable because of what she cannot control.

I want to be honest today – I have never even been close to walking in Hannah's shoes. I have trouble relating to what she went through – because I have three wonderful adult children (and two awesome step-children). I have friends who have poured out their hearts to God as Hannah did – praying for children – but they never promised to give them up as she did.

I have always found that part of this story strange by the way, but that is probably because I live in a different time and place. And – now – it is completely ok to not even want children. Being a woman has nothing to do with having kids now. That's the difference between Hannah's time and ours.

What really resonated with me was this – Hannah has no control over whether she gets pregnant. She has a choice – let it drive her to the point of not eating and deep sorrow, or pour out her heart to God and let it go.

It took her awhile, like letting go usually does – and this wasn't just her wishing for a new dress or new pair of shoes. Her purpose in life – as she has been taught culturally and most likely by her family of origin – is to bear sons for her husband. So not having *any* children means Hannah is not really a woman in everyone else's eyes, and especially her own.

Letting go might have meant giving up the idea that Hannah could ever really be the woman she was supposed to be – for that time and place.

Now *that* I can relate to.

When my parents divorced, I was 28 years old. I always knew they had a tough marriage and I always knew they didn't get along well. But for them to split up after 28 years caught me off guard pretty bad. And there was not one thing I could do about it. I didn't even find out until after it was done.

I wondered for years afterward – would I become an orphan? Would my parents forget about me? Would they try to drag me into their fights? Did I even still have a family?

My entire identity as a daughter seemed to be dissolving right before my eyes.

Then my dad remarried about 5 years later and it got worse. Don't get me wrong, my step-mom is amazing and my dad is finally truly happy. But I was absolutely positively sure he would forget about me.

I was trying to control things in my head that were not mine to control. And I was miserable and full of fear and could not find peace.

I finally let go. And it took several tries over a few months. For me, letting go wasn't like Hannah did at Shiloh – crying her heart out in prayer. For me, I had to write stuff and talk through it and light candles and pray. And that's ok – we all let go differently.

That is what I've been doing with my students this week – letting go of their situations. What I **can** do is give them encouragement, a listening ear, and lots of hope – while also adjusting my teaching (and grading) for this weird space we are in. All of that is in my control while the rest must be released.

Speaking of control, the prayer that Hannah supposedly sang after Samuel was born hits a point that we in 2020 and in the United States struggle with. Hannah flat out claims – the Lord is in control of EVERYTHING. Ooooph. That is a hard pill to swallow today.

And – I think it depends on how we interpret that. If God is in control of everything, does that mean my parents' divorce was God's doing? I don't agree with that. My parents made a choice that took a few months to make happen – they had plenty of opportunity to change their minds but they didn't. Their divorce was their choice, not God being in control.

I think Hannah's song can bring us hope in a different way – perhaps God isn't up on high pulling our strings like puppets. Perhaps God is in and with and around us all the time, making sure that folks who get too proud and too big and too rich are brought back to earth **AND** folks who are too oppressed and too forgotten and too poor are given all they need.

Maybe that is why at the beginning of her song, Hannah sings, “My heart rejoices in the Lord. My strength rises up in the Lord!” What if our hope and peace come from the **presence** of God, balancing everything out, instead of God controlling everything?

And what if **our** job is to let go of what we cannot control, do what we can with what we can control, and let God take care of the rest?

CHAT WITH GOD TIME

Pray as you are comfortable – read silently, say out loud, whisper.

Hey God – do you know how hard this is?
To figure out what I can control and what I can't?

And sometimes I'd rather try to control stuff I can't
Than look at myself and the few things I can control

Will you help me learn the difference?
Will you help me learn how to let go?

May it be so

LET YOUR SOUL RESPOND

As you wish, choose a theme, and participate in a response to the story and the message.



ANXIETY

Practice awareness

- What creates deep anxiety in your life?
- Have you acted out on your anxiety?

What does non-anxiety look like to you?



CONTROL

Practice reflection

- What do you have control over in your life?
- How do you try to control what isn't yours to control?

What happens when you try to control something and it backfires?



RELEASE

Practice wisdom

- What might releasing what you cannot control look like?
- Who could help you learn how to release control?

What helps you let go and let God move in your life?

Options to share your responses:
(see end of packet for online options)

- create a piece of art representing your thoughts
- choose a song or playlist that shares your thoughts
- write something that reflects your thoughts
- what else can you imagine?

LET YOUR MIND RESPOND

Choose a “thought & question” pair to think about. You can do one or as many as you’d like.

1. Hannah is a hot mess with sorrow and desperation that she cannot have a son. *What in your life has you in a hot mess? What do you see in the world that is a hot mess in a similar way?*
2. Hannah makes a bargain with God – promising God can have her son if only she could have one. *How have you made bargains with God? What about other folks you know?*
3. Miraculously, Hannah gets pregnant not long after she prays at Shiloh. *What happens when God doesn’t say yes to our requests? How might we respond to each other when our hopes are dashed?*

Options to share your responses:
(see end of packet for online options)

- create a piece of art representing your thoughts
- choose a song or playlist that shares your thoughts
- write something that reflects your thoughts
- what else can you imagine?

LET YOUR BODY RESPOND

What will you do with this experience?

Choose an action (or more) to act on what you've learned ...

- Do some research on Google about how women are perceived because of their children
- Write a song about pouring your heart out to God
- Draw a picture of someone waiting for something that might never happen
- Make something for a family who struggles with infertility
- Light a candle for each thing you want to release in your life

Options to share your responses:
(see end of packet for online options)

- create a piece of art representing your thoughts
- choose a song or playlist that shares your thoughts
- write something that reflects your thoughts
- what else can you imagine?

END HERE ...



Prepare for our return to our daily lives

- Take 3 deep breaths and calm your mind
- Consider the stillness of a lit candle



Pray as you are comfortable – read silently, say out loud, whisper

God, guide me through the day
God remind me of Christ's presence
Under me, over me
On my right and on my left
God, breathe in and through me

May it be so.

SEE YOU NEXT WEEK! PASTOR CRISTINE

ONLINE RESPONSE OPTIONS

How will you share this experience with our youth group?

If you would like to share your responses online with our youth and leaders, make sure you are part of our MVCC Youth Google Group.

Email Pastor Cristine at youth@montevista.org for more information.