

1 Samuel 1-2
Hannah's Prayer
WRCoB 10.13.24

The thing I love about the Bible is its brutal honesty.

The Bible tells it like it is.

It doesn't try to minimize wrongdoing in its heroes.

People are people in the Bible
The good, the bad, and the very ugly.

The heroes are sleaze balls
The sleaze balls, heroes.

All have issues.

Motherhood, our subject matter today
Has issues as well.

Motherhood is no picnic, then or now
No perfect motherhood stories.

Naomi lost her husband and two sons

Eve and Mary, lost sons, too, in traumatic ways.

Most women in the Bible
Faced oppressive circumstances
Few rose to power or prominence.

But the stories in the Bible

 Show women's resiliency, determination
 And a deep faith in a sovereign God.

They lived in diverse conditions

 Thriving at times
 Surviving at other times
 Always persevering.

In our culture too.

 There are stories of women and mothers
 That shows strength in difficult circumstances

Our culture is a culture of a multitude of scenarios.

It is of a motherhood postponed for later in life

A motherhood departed by infant mortality
 Disrupted by divorce
 Unachieved by infertility
 And undesired singleness.

Of course, our culture also includes wonderful families
 Strong marriages and happy children

Single women and mothers having successful careers
 Some holding roles once dominated by men.

Single woman, divorced woman
 Women with children and childless women

All gifted in their own way
Through a God that has empowered them
Above and beyond traditional roles.

Heck specks, even a woman is running for president.

The point is that there is not
A one-size-fits-all journey in womanhood

And consequently, we hurt women in our churches
By venerating one path over all others.

We have come a long way from the early days
And yet there continues to be work
Towards a more gender-equitable society.

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The story of Hannah is a role model of sorts

She bucked the conventions of her society
Pushed the envelope of traditionalism

Though she maintained a traditional role
As a wife to Elkanah and mother

She challenged the repressive nature of her society

And yet did it with grace and respect
Through her love and trust in a sovereign God.

Join me, in taking a look at today's Bible character
Hannah.

By now, if you have read the Bible up to this point
You begin to see a common theme

Three of the matriarchs, Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel
And now Hannah were all barren.

But through their prayers and God's gracious responses
They were able to bear children at ages way beyond
Their natural child-bearing years.

Dr. Lapsley from the Union Pres Seminary
Warns the preacher when preaching about Hannah

Not to preach to the women in their congregations
Who struggle with infertility issues
That all they need is a little more faith.

If they do, be prepared
For an onslaught of emails on Monday morning.

She's right.

It's important to place Hannah
In the social context in which she lived.

Her identity and status were deeply intertwined
With her role as wife and mother.

Bearing children was the main objective in life.

If she couldn't bear children
She could be cast aside
And another woman brought in.

Her barrenness wasn't just a personal struggle
It was a source of shame and humiliation.

Her husband, Elkanah, might have loved her
But the taunts of his other wife, Peninnah
Overpowered any of his consoling gestures.

She mocked and plagued Hannah
To the point of despair
Relentlessly reminding her
Of her failure as a woman.

Every year, when Elkanah took his family to Shiloh
For their yearly offering
Peninnah would provoke Hannah.

Hannah would weep and refuse to eat.

And instead of confronting Peninnah
For her excessive abuse toward Hannah
Elkanah would meekly ask

1 Samuel 1:8 CEB

“Hannah, why are you crying?”

“Why won't you eat? Why are you so sad? Aren't I worth more to you than ten sons?”

Well, Elkanah, sorry to inform you, but apparently not!

Hannah's pain was deep.

She poured out her heart to the Lord in prayer
Begging for a son.

1 Samuel 1:11 NRSV

She made this vow: "O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head."

Hannah's prayer is a testament to unwavering faith.

It reveals the depth of her longing
A willingness to give up the very thing
She so desperately wanted.

Like Abraham willing to sacrifice Isaac
The very son he too so desperately wanted.

She promises to dedicate her son to the Lord
To live a life separated for God's service.

God heard Hannah's plea and vow.

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The Narrative Lectionary, we are using
Skips over an important interaction
Between Hannah and the acting priest, Eli.

Hannah was on her knees praying with heart and soul
Pleading with God for a child.

Eli, saw her move her lips
But not hearing her words
Thought she was being disrespectful.

1 Samuel 1:14-15 CEB

**¹⁴ “How long will you act like a drunk? Sober up!”
Eli told her. ¹⁵ “No sir!” Hannah replied. “I’m just a
very sad woman. I haven’t had any wine or beer but
have been pouring out my heart to the Lord.**

Eli showed no respect or sensitivity to Hannah
As she poured out her heart in anguish.

But we see Hannah’s courage in defending herself.

1 Samuel 1:16 CEB

**¹⁶ Don’t think your servant is some good-for-nothing
woman. This whole time I’ve been praying out of my
great worry and trouble!”**

And at that point, Eli, sensing her sincerity, blessed her.

And God blessed her and answered her prayer
By giving her a son, Samuel.

Hannah keeping her promise to dedicate Samuel
Brought him to the priest, Eli
After he was weaned and diaper trained.

She reminded Eli of their previous encounter.

1 Samuel 1:26-28 CEB

²⁶ “Excuse me, sir!” Hannah said. “As surely as you live, sir, I am the woman who stood here next to you, praying to the Lord. ²⁷ I prayed for this boy, and the Lord gave me what I asked from him. ²⁸ So now I give this boy back to the Lord. As long as he lives, he is given to the Lord.”

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Hannah's story is not just about a woman
Who wanted a child.

It's about a woman who trusted God
And in the midst of despair
Experienced God's faithfulness.

Hannah's story doesn't end there.

God blesses Hannah with five more children
Three sons and two daughters.

But throughout the story of Hannah
We see her every move as an act of faith

Her song of thanksgiving found in chapter 2
Put to words her heartfelt gratitude.

1 Samuel 2:1-2 CEB

My heart rejoices in the Lord. My strength rises up in the Lord! My mouth mocks my enemies because I rejoice in your deliverance. ² No one is holy like the Lord—no, no one except you! There is no rock like our God!

Hannah's prayer echoes through the ages

A testament to God's power and faithfulness.

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The Apostle Paul says

Romans 8:28 NRSV

²⁸ We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

Marsha Mark clung to these words

Quoted by a friend of hers.

Marsha, God is going to use your struggle with infertility for his glory.

A doctor had just announced to her and her husband

That they needed to accept the fact

They could no longer expect biological children.

She was beginning menopause.

Her husband, a scientist, stopped praying

Knowing that nature had taken its course.

Six months later

Marsha went to the doctor for some tests

Including her wish to have a pregnancy test.

They looked at me with pity and said, "No. You haven't had any cycles for seven months. Asking for another pregnancy test indicates you are not accepting things as they are."

She begged them.

The test came back positive.

Over the next two weeks

She had four more pregnancy tests

And three sonograms at her doctor's request.

It seems they were having trouble accepting the facts.

Her full-term pregnancy was uneventful.

Each day a song was sung

Expressing what Hannah expressed in her song.

Amanda Joy was born.

They call her Miracle Mandy.

We should not be surprised in the unexpected ways

God works in this world.

Despite adversity and disbelief

Her unwavering trust led to a unexpected outcome

(Marsha Marks, "Special Delivery," Christian Reader (Sep/Oct 2000), pp. 15-17)

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And just as miraculous as Marsha's story
Is Ann Kiemel Anderson's story.

She and her husband had tried for years to conceive.
She miscarried every conception.

But she too, clung to the words of the Apostle Paul
Something good would result in their prayers.

Today, she says she and her husband stand in awe
As they look at their four beloved adopted boys.

God does work for the good for those who love him.

(Ann Kiemel Anderson, Today's Christian Woman, "Heart to Heart.")

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Hannah, Marsha, and Ann's stories a
Are beacons of hope for all of us

Reminding us that even in the darkest of times
God is with us, hearing our prayers
And working in our lives.

To God be the glory.