

Hannah's Song

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1 Samuel 2:1-10

Some people think life is a musical. It is difficult for me to think about putting my own life into a song. If you sing like me that is particularly true. Now, Genevieve is kind enough that she has not paid me not to sing in the choir.

One of the most lovable characters in the Winnie the Pooh books is Tigger. That is spelled "T...I... double grr...rrrr." Tigger is enormously full of himself and enormously grateful to be himself! He expresses his joy with himself in a song, a very nice song that I wish were about me. It goes like this, "The wonderful thing about Tiggers Is Tiggers are wonderful things. Their tops are made out of rubber. Their bottoms are made out of springs. They're bouncy, trouncy, flouncy, pouncy! Fun, fun, fun, fun, fun! But the most wonderful thing about Tiggers, Is I'm the only one, I'm the only one!"

Sometimes simple facts tell a story that does not need a lot of elaboration. Hear the facts in the story of Hannah in the Bible:

- Hannah is a much-loved, but childless wife, in a faithful Jewish family.
- The highlight of the year for the family is a visit to the Temple.
- Her husband, Elkanah, gives each family member a gift with which to make an offering.
- Hannah gets two shares because her husband loves her, but
- Elkanah has another wife, Peninnah, who has many children so she gets many shares.
- Peninnah never lets Hannah forget how many children she has or how much she gets

or that Hannah has not given her husband an heir.

- In the Temple, Hannah weeps and prays to God asking for a son. She promises to give her son back to God.
- Through the priest, Eli, Hannah receives her promise from God.
- In due course the child, Samuel, is born. When he is weaned she gives him to Eli, the priest, to serve God.
- Hannah prays her song of gratitude to God for the promise God has kept and for the honor she has received in Samuel's birth.

Scripture

¹ *Hannah prayed and said,
'My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in my God.*

My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in my victory.

² *There is no Holy One like the Lord, no one besides you;*

there is no Rock like our God.

³ *Talk no more so very proudly,
let not arrogance come from your mouth;
for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by his actions are weighed.*

⁴ *The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength.*

⁵ *Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,
but those who were hungry are fat with spoil.*

*The barren has borne seven,
but she who has many children is forlorn.*

⁶ *The Lord kills and brings to life;
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.*

⁷ *The Lord makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low, he also exalts.*

⁸ *He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap,
to make them sit with princes
and inherit a seat of honor.*

“Hannah's song teaches us to risk our faith and dares us to place our deepest requests before God in prayer.”

*For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's,
and on them he has set the world.*

⁹ *'He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness;
for not by might does one prevail.*

¹⁰ *The Lord! His adversaries shall be shattered;
the Most High will thunder in heaven.
The Lord will judge the ends of the earth;
he will give strength to his king,
and exalt the power of his anointed.'*

As the years pass, God blesses Hannah beyond the original promise. God chooses to make Samuel a Prophet and Judge through whom God speaks and, ultimately, through whom God anoints the great hero, David, to be king.

Those facts constitute our story for this Sunday. One way to think about this story is to look at the faith Hannah displays:

- She has faith that her husband loves her;
- She has faith that God will hear her cry and that she is free to pour her pain and even anger out before God;
- She has faith that God will fulfill the promise God made to her; and
- She has faith that when she keeps her promise and returns her son Samuel to God, Samuel will be blessed.

Hannah truly is a model for us of what our faith in God could look like.

- It starts with our appreciation for the good God already places in our lives - for Hannah that is a

husband who loves her deeply;

- It continues with our trust that God's mercy and compassion are so strong that we can honestly and fully lift our pain and anger and hope to God in prayer;
- Our faith shows itself in our listening to hear God's response -even if the answer is different from for which we originally prayed;
- Faith involves our trusting that God's answer is for our good - and sometimes that good will be far beyond our asking;
- Hannah never dreamed of her son to become the first prophet to anoint the kings of Israel; and
- Our faith leads to our celebrating with joyful gratitude for what God has done and is doing and is yet to do for us.

Hannah teaches us that faith is not just belief in God or in God's goodness, love, power and mercy. Faith is the understanding that God, whom we cannot see, is more real than those we can see who cause us pain. It is betting that we are important enough to God to raise our cries and requests for help. It is trusting that God will make all things work together for good - even the small things that matter to us.

Some of you may have heard my Hannah/Samuel type story. Before my first birthday, I became very sick. My parents, then just in their 20s with their first child, were very afraid I would die. They held hands and knelt down beside my bed and prayed to God. They prayed for God to spare me and let

me live. They promised that, if I lived, they would dedicate me to God's service. So here I am serving God with you at COP. Given God's action healing me, and my parent's promise, what chance did I have for it to end differently? What chance did you have to avoid having me be here?

What can we learn from God's story with Hannah and Samuel for God's story with us?

We can learn that:

1. **God hears the cries and petitions we bring even though we do not always get what we want.** This is a deep belief in the Jewish tradition and a gift from that tradition to ours. We see it in the psalms again and again when the psalmist makes a request of God and then immediately thanks God. The thanks come even before God can have time to act. In the parable of the persistent neighbor Jesus teaches us to go on asking because God hears even if the request is not immediately granted.
2. **When God makes a promise God keeps that promise** - sometimes in ways that far exceed our expectations. God's promises teach us that God, who is faithful in Jesus' life, is faithful in ours as well.
3. **When we make a promise to God, we must deliver what we have promised.** As the story of Ananias and his wife show us in the Book of Acts 2, it is a risky thing to make a promise to God and not keep it. They promised the proceeds of the sale of their property to the new Christian community but then broke their promise and kept the money. They were struck dead - so makers of un-kept promises beware! While Hannah offers a deal to God, God does not seek Hannah's "deal." What God wants is that Hannah accept God's deal to her and keep her promise. God will be Hannah's God and she and Samuel will be God's people - that's the deal. The same is true today. God is our God and we are God's people. God looks with

favor on our keeping of promises just as God did with Hannah's keeping of her promise.

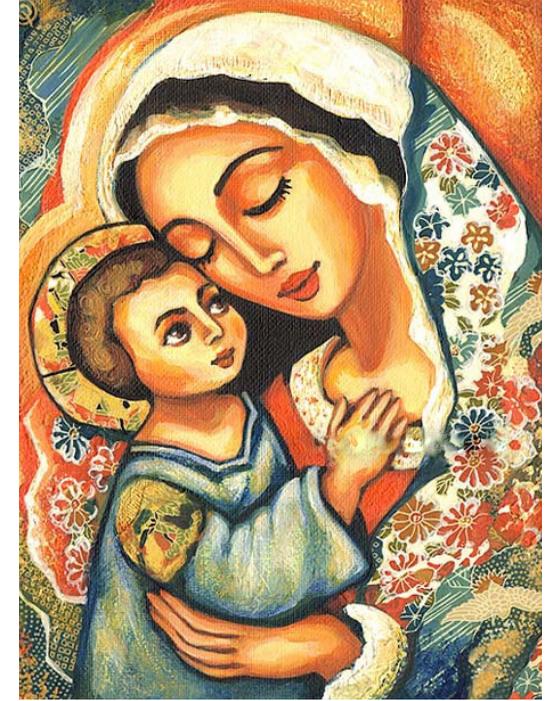
4. **Our thankful and worshipful praise of God is our appropriate response to what God does for us.** This is a foundational part of Presbyterian Reformed theology. Everything we do for God is done not to earn God's favor, but to express our gratitude for the favor God has already given us in Jesus Christ. Our worship, our care for one another, our obedience to the faith, our joyful proclamation of the Gospel, our service given to others in Jesus' name; our love for God; and our love for neighbor - all are expressions of gratitude for God's holy grace to us.

Hannah's son, Samuel, grew up to: be a ruling judge of the nation; directly speak God's words to the nation; and anoint kings to rule the nation. Surely, Hannah was grateful for the high service to God Samuel came to give. But her song was for the blessing God first put in her life in answer to her prayer - the prayer for a child that she delivered with such passion, the priest Eli thought her drunk! The prayer that God answered giving her a child that she named Samuel which means "God has heard," a child that she returned, as promised, to God.

Hannah's song teaches us to risk our faith and dares us to place our deepest requests before God in prayer. It dares us to trust that God will hear us and that God's answer may be more wonderful than we expect or can even understand. In the power of the song we get to bear witness to God's grace and love in our past, present and future.

If you are my Facebook friends, you will notice most of my daily mantras are my thanks and gratitude to God. Like Hannah, I am very thankful; I ask blessings of God; and I make promises to God. Every day, I sing loudly in my house, (poor Will), thanking God for all I get to do in God's service and love.

I invite you to join me in joining Hannah in singing a song of praise in gratitude to God for what God has and will do for us.



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