

9 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.) 10 Hannah was very upset and couldn't stop crying as she prayed to the Lord. 11 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."

19 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. 20 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."

2 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.

2 No one is holy like the Lord—
no, no one except you!

There is no rock like our God!

3 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.

4 The bows of mighty warriors are shattered,
but those who were stumbling now dress themselves in power! 5 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! 6 The Lord!

He brings death, gives life,
takes down to the grave, and raises up!

7 The Lord!

He makes poor, gives wealth,
brings low, but also lifts up high! 8 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!

9 God guards the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked die in darkness
because no one succeeds by strength alone. 10 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. **-Common English Bible**

Twice in one week she called to express her strong desire for home communion. When I talked with her the deacons meeting was just five days away so I asked if she could wait until after that meeting to allow me time to find a deacon to accompany me. She agreed that she could wait. And a deacon indicated she had two hours she could share on a Thursday and thus a plan was made. When I called to let her know that we would come and when, I could hear the joy in her voice “You don’t know what this means to me, it means so much.”

When we arrived at her house she greeted us promptly at the door with hugs and repeated her declaration, “You don’t know what this means to me.” She hadn’t had communion in months. Maybe even a year. Hadn’t been able to make it to church. In the hour we shared with her, she explained in myriad ways just what communion means to her— it means connection to God and to God’s family. The longer she is away from Christ’s table the more disconnected she feels, and she wants to be connected; she needs to be connected.

Just as I was sitting down she handed me an offering envelope with a financial contribution to the congregation and a bag of box tops and pop tabs for the bins in which we collected such things. I smiled when she made this offering and said, “You know, every time we have communion it comes right after the offering... so you’ve just done exactly what we do in worship.” “I know,” she said, “That’s why I did it.” We then proceeded to pray and sing and read scripture, today’s reading, in fact, and to talk a bit about the story, and the significance of connection with God and God’s family, and then we shared the bread and the cup and closed with prayer and song. We shared signs of peace as we left and she was overjoyed, so grateful. “I feel whole,” she said.

We pick up the story of Hannah today mid-stream, just dipping into three moments of it. Allow me to give you some backstory. There was a man named Elkanah who had two wives— Hannah and Penninah. Penninah birthed many children. Hannah was barren. The earlier material in 1 Samuel suggests that Penninah taunted or tormented Hannah. It’s not hard to imagine a painful, competitive relationship between the two women. But I also think it is possible that the very existence of each of Penninah’s children could have felt like a taunt or an insult to Hannah. Your sister wife having an

abundance of exactly what you lack would be agonizing. Infertility is still agonizing, every baby bump and stroller and squawking child in a restaurant can feel like an insult. That is still true. But in that context there was a whole other layer added— a woman who had no son was worthless; she was failing to fulfill her primary purpose.

It is likely that when they were at home Hannah and Penninah lived in separate tents and avoided each other as much as possible. However, at least once a year they would have to be in each other's company for the pilgrimage to the worship site in Shiloh- a center for Jewish worship before the temple was built in Jerusalem. I invite you to imagine this road trip. I imagine it makes even your most tedious travels with children squawking "Are we there yet?" or romantic partners squabbling over whether or not to ask for directions after passing the same building ten times pale in comparison. Imagine you are the sad Hannah, walking side by side with your husband and the other woman AND her many children. All the normal squawks and noises of the children must have stung Hannah as they made her contemplate what she did not have and if indeed there were harsh words from Penninah— even worse. Every year this trip must have gotten a little bit harder and Hannah's sadness must have become more profound. And imagine how her lonely despair must have intensified when her husband was absolutely unable to understand how she could be so sad. You'll see that if you read earlier in the chapter. This sadness was also a bit of a problem as when they arrived in Shiloh for the religious holiday they were supposed to join in a joyful feast. In fact, the Jewish law left no place for sadness at these events. Participants were to be utterly joyful. I imagine that for a number of years Hannah put on a happy mask after her arduous journey and went through the motions of the religious celebration. But by the time of the story we heard this morning she could not put on a mask and could not bring herself to eat. All she could do was weep.

And we dipped into the story today to find a weeping Hannah in the temple, praying fervently to God. Despite her despair, I want you to note several things about Hannah's actions— first, she "presented herself before the Lord." Even though she felt forgotten by God, disconnected from God, she put herself in a position to be remembered and to get connected. And she laid out the deepest desire of her heart— to be remembered and to be granted a son.

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And here's the second thing I want you to notice— before there was any evidence that this request would be granted she made a promise— to dedicate the son that God would gift her to God's service for his entire life, to give back to God the very gift that she was requesting from God. And if you keep reading in this book you'll see that that's exactly what she did, as soon as her son was weaned she dropped him off at the temple where he was raised by the priest.

This son she birthed, whom she named Samuel— a name that speaks of God's remembrance of her— this child is the fruit of her strong connection with God— she affirms this with the name she gives him. And he becomes the first great prophet of Israel, the one who anoints Israel's first kings, including David. And the weeping Hannah is transformed into the jubilantly singing Hannah— who sings of the power of God to reverse fortunes, to uplift the powerless, to topple the powerful.

I began today with the story of a home communion several years back. I did so because I think I met Hannah that Thursday. I met a woman longing for connection with God and putting herself in a position to get connected. I met a woman who made an offering of herself before even receiving the gift she requested. And I met a woman transformed from sorrow to joy when indeed a little bread, a little juice, and the love of two sisters in Christ gifted her with exactly the connection she desired.

I think we all know something of a yearning for connection. If we're not feeling it right now, surely at some point in the last four years we have... remember the months and months of lock down and social distance? Some are still staying home and have only received communion virtually for years now. Many of you have told me that being close together in the chapel was a powerful experience this summer and that the weeks of story sharing moved you more than expected. I think these summer experiences resonated so because of the yearning for connection that so many still feel. I am grateful for all of you who are putting yourself in a position to be connected, despite challenges: you who are finding your way here on Sunday mornings or logging on to zoom and Facebook, showing up for spirituality group, participating in Men's Bible Study or anti-racism group or Enneagram study; you who are showing up for Zoomed or in person coffee chats; you who are gathering on first Saturdays to fill ziplocs for vulnerable neighbors; you who are calling each other and sending cards to

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each other; you who are making food for West Women's and Children's Shelter and making donations for myriad missions; you who are reading your Bible daily or praying morning and night; you who are sharing faith with your children or grandchildren; you who are singing with the choir; you who are sharing your grief with other members of your faith family; you who are continuing to make commitments and practice generosity even in the face of great uncertainty. St. A's is living into our connection in Christ even as we yearn for closer and stronger connection in these wearying days.

You, too, friends, are like Hannah, presenting yourselves before the Lord, putting yourselves in a position to connect with God, making commitments to God— even before you know that God is going to grant your deepest desires. Every time we extend invitations to generosity, you are given an opportunity to present yourselves before the Lord, to put yourselves in a position to connect with God, to make a commitment to God, to see all that you have as a gift from God and to dedicate some portion of it, maybe even all of it, in some way, back to God in gratitude. Our part is small— some money in a plate, a number on a card— God's part is huge— the gift of all that we need and often much of what we desire. How much does this mean to you?