

## Sermon: November 14<sup>th</sup>. A child is born-Samuel! 1 Samuel 1:4-20

**Prayer:** Gracious God, you called us to be your children. Speak your message of love for family. May your word take roots in our lives as we worship? Amen

**Introduction:** The Old Testament text from I Samuel tells the story of family life. Today we will hear about Hannah and her desperate need to bear a child for her husband.

Each autumn, Hannah and her family would make the pilgrimage from their home in Ramah to the religious center at Shiloh. Shiloh was where the nation celebrated the “**Feast of Tabernacles.**” This was the annual celebration of the harvest and the **renewal** of the covenant between the community of faith and God. It was one of the three holiest festivals. This was the day Hannah spent with her son-Samuel.

It was a journey of two days traveling along the narrow, rocky roads, among the hills and fertile valleys. When will we get there seemed to be the burning question for Hannah. How much further do we have to travel? A trip out of town was tireless then and unlike today’s traveling. We have so many stops for refreshments and rest.

The court of the Tabernacle was in the centre of the town. Since the days of Joshua it was where the community of faith gathered for worship. It was at the temple that Hannah reunited with Samuel. It was a celebration of national “Thanksgiving” and gratitude for the harvest.

At the beginning of the story and before Samuel was born, Hannah had no harvest - no children - and, in fact had a rival in her own house. Elkanah, her husband, had taken himself another wife, named Peninnah. According to the religious traditional laws it was perfectly legal. A man had a right to have children to work with him to provide security for his old age and to make sure that his name would remain alive after his death.

For a devout woman like Hannah, this was a very difficult trial to her faith and relationship with the community. It is difficult to taste food and join in any celebration when a person is choking back salty tears, rejection and shame. Elkanah said; "Hannah, why are you so miserable? Am I not more to you than ten sons?"

With deep grief and pain Hannah allowed the tears to flow down her cheeks. The entire community knew her humiliation. She could not conceive. She carried the pain of rejection and isolation deep within her soul. But God did not abandon her. Amidst her grief and dismay she found herself at **the door of God's house.** As she stood there, Hannah began to mumble her distress through her tears. Over and over she repeated her prayer, hoping against hope for a miracle to happen.

Eli, the High Priest, had been near the doorway of the temple. He watched in silence as this distraught woman stood mumbling and finally spoke to her. "**Woman, you are drunk. Go home and sober up.**" With firmness and dignity, and yet in perfect courtesy, Hannah responded, "**I have not been pouring wine; I have been pouring out my soul.**"

Eli realized that she is a decent and God-fearing woman. In a tone of apology he sent her away with a benediction. Instead of asking God for strength to make the world a better place, *Hannah simply sought a better place for herself in the world. She took initiative and God changed her relationships.*

Her community marginalized her but deep in her heart was fear for God. When no one loved her she believed God loved her. When she was isolated and dehumanized, God did not abandon her. When she was broken to pieces she gathered strength and poured her soul out to God. Throughout her agony and searching for answers she felt God's compassion.

Hannah's heart raced as she took in the sight once more. She remembered the family's journey the prior year and the conversations she had with her young son in preparation for his new life. She taught him the religious practices of her faith in God. God created the whole world and their ancestors lived an active faith in God.

She told Samuel of the great ancestors of the faith: Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Deborah, Ruth, Naomi. She told him of Moses in the bull-rushes, Joseph and his coat of many colours. She explained her years of despair, pitiful prayer, and her promise to God. She told all of that to a little child. Samuel's life would be a perpetual witness to the world. Her active faith was the perfect example that God exists, God hears prayer, and God answers prayers. Samuel's life was a witness to his community. God is a caring God for the needs of every family. God had given her Samuel; and she gave him back to the work of God.

At the temple in Shiloh, Hannah waited nervously. Would her child Samuel remember her? He was so young when they had last seen each other. Would he be angry or resentful at her for leaving him to live with Eli? She had tried to explain, but wonder if he been old enough to understand? Her hands clutched and unclutched at the care package she brought for Samuel.

Mother and son had a wonderful visit. But for Hannah, the journey to Shiloh would never be a misery or a nightmare as we say today when we are caught in traffic. She would be back the next year and another year- another Mother's Day, Christmas, graduation, birthday - and she would bring a care package for her child. The same way we do today.

Do you recall the days when your children or grand-children, or friend went off to college/university or away from home to seek employment, or to take refuge in a new country, or to seek a better quality of life in a another country, or when a child left home in haste to search for his/her destiny. Do you remember when someone close to you traveled far from home? The emotions run deep and sometimes words cannot explain it all.

Hannah had already given her child the best gift. She prepared him for a life that would see him become the spiritual leader. Samuel presided as priest for forty years, celebrated their feasts, interceding for the people before the Lord, and served as judge and councilor in practical affairs. Hannah had given her son the **gift of love and taught him the love for God**. Fear for God. The Good News-God is the giver of miracles of ancient times, today and tomorrow. "The Lord took note of Hannah, gave her three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord." (2:21)

In small and simple ways we see the signs of God. **Do not abandon God's house.** Fear God. God has not given up on you and you should not become complacent. We come to worship God, Creator Spirit.

It is my prayer that we trust in the Word and through prayer and praise we encounter the mysteries God has in store for us. Let us come into this place with heartfelt gratitude to God who called us by name. Come with humility that we may discern and be inspired by God. Let us strive to live an active faith through deepening and connecting our relationship with God and the wider community. God be with you! God's people say: Amen!

**Prayers: For the people. In your mercy: Hear us**

God of song and silence, God of life and breath, God of the ancient stories, of today and tomorrow, you fill our eyes with the beauty of the autumn season, our ears with the sounds around us. Pour your Holy Spirit on your Holy Body gathered here and in every community of faith for the sake of all creation.

**In your mercy: Hear us**

We give thanks for the signs of your presence, in the bright red leaves of a maple tree, glowing against a deep blue sky; and in the rushing waters of a clear mountain stream. We give thanks for the long years of friendship. Help us to do the work you called us to do. Grant us faith and strength through the Spirit.

**In your mercy: Hear us**

We remember those who are homeless, those who have food insecurities and home insecurities, the unemployed, those who are sick and those who are in grief. We pray for healing, compassion and care. We remember our seniors and their care-givers. We pray for the community of Bolton and those who proclaim your message of peace and love. Grant insights and possibilities to work in harmony for the goodwill of all people.

**In your mercy: Hear us**

We pray for those who make the laws and all those who act as judges and juries, those who keep the peace and those who are compelled to go to war. We remember the oppressed and those who oppress others. May your justice and love for humanity prevailed in every nation? Teach us to learn your ways of love for both strangers and neighbours.

In silence we pray for ourselves, family and all in need of your grace.

**In your mercy: Hear us**

Our Father....

Rev. Margaret MacDonald