

## Wesley United Methodist Church

November 15, 2015

“God Remembers.”

1 Samuel 1:1-20

On these opening pages of 1 Samuel we are introduced to a family drama. Here is the story of Elkanah and his two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Immediately, we encounter tension in this family which is the result of Hannah's barrenness. Hannah's husband loves her and treats her with kindness. When they traveled to Shiloh on the day of sacrifice, Elkanah would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to her sons and daughters, but he would give a double portion to Hannah, and the text tells us he did this because he loved her even though she was barren. The conflict in the story is the result of Peninnah's verbal abuse of Hannah. Peninnah would constantly scold and provoke her severely because of her barrenness. Every time they would go up together to the house of the Lord, Peninnah would criticize. Hannah would be driven to tears by the constant belittling, feeling that she couldn't take it anymore. She was so upset that she lost her appetite and could not eat. Elkanah was not aware of the emotional strain that Hannah was under. He seemed to be totally out of touch with the seriousness of the situation. He reveals his lack of perception by saying to Hannah, “Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?” Sadly, both lover and provoker treat Hannah as God-forsaken.

While they were worshiping at Shiloh, Hannah rose early in the morning and prayed to the Lord. In her distress and bitterness, Hannah took the initiative to bring her case to God. She assumed that the God of Israel might care for those who are hurting and are and are without status and power. So in her prayer she cried out and said to the Lord: O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but give your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life and no razor will ever be used on his head..

The priest Eli was sitting near the entrance of the sanctuary and he saw Hannah at prayer. He noticed that her lips moved but she did not seem to be speaking. Thinking she was drunk, he told her that she was making a drunken spectacle of herself and that she ought to get rid of the wine. Hannah explained to him that she was not drunk, and that she did not drink wine. She declared, “I am a woman deeply troubled...pouring out my soul before the Lord.”

She begged Eli that she not be considered as a “worthless woman.” Then Eli made a remarkable response to her by saying, “Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him.” But Eli had no idea what the child who resulted from this vow would mean to his own priestly family. Hannah left the temple much encouraged and feeling as though her prayer was going to make a difference. She was no longer sad, because she had placed her future in God's hands. In due time Hannah bore a son and she named him Samuel. When he was weaned she brought Samuel to the house of the Lord at Shiloh, and she presented him to the Lord, saying, “As long as he lives he is yours.” Little did she or Elkanah know that Samuel was to become a prophet, a mediator of God's word to all Israel.

Throughout this drama, God is the determining power. It is God who has ‘closed her womb’(5-6); it is God to whom Hannah prays and makes her vow (10-11); it is God whom Eli invokes to grant Hannah's petition (17); it is God who ‘remembers’ Hannah and grants her request (19); it is God to whom the child, Samuel, is given in service (27-28) God works in all the events of this story.

At the point of our discouragement, despair, and disappointment is the place of God's beginning. It is not in getting the right spiritual discipline or the latest strategic planning process that will meet our needs. As Hannah reveals, it is simply expressing our need to God. And in doing so, Hannah recognized that the wholeness in her life lay beyond those things that she could and could not control and she rested her life in God's grace.

Many of us have felt the same anxiety and struggle that Hannah felt. One's sense of worthlessness can result from the inability to reach one's goals and ambitions, instead experiencing constant defeat and

setback. There may be unkind words and caustic criticism of others and they may cause you too, to lose your appetite as Hannah's did.

This is a story of God's grace coming to Hannah in the darkest moment of her life. God remembered Hannah. In her darkest moment, she made her greatest discovery. God did not forget her. God heard her cry, sensed her misery, and answered her prayer. It can also be the story of God's grace for us.

We can learn from Hannah the persistence that is needed to claim God's grace. She felt that she had lost God's attention. However, Jesus taught us that we already have God's attention, and that God is aware of our need. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus declared, "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him" Matt 6:8. Job felt that he did not have God's attention. Out of his pain and anguish he cried, "O that I knew where I might find him!" Habakkuk, the prophet, felt that he did not have God's attention. He wanted to know where he could find God amid such injustice and violence. He cried, "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not hear?" Both men discovered what Hannah discovered—that God is neither remote nor reluctant.

The fact is that God is not far removed from any of us. God is not disinterested to the point that we need begging and pleading for his concern. What is needed on our part is not a relentless beating on heaven's door, but just for us to know that God is. God cares. God remembers. A little girl whose parents were missionaries in India, prayed this prayer, "God bless my parents, and my brother and sister, my friends and our world. And now, God, take good care of yourself, for if anything ever happens to you, we'd be in a terrible mess." She knew that God was near and attentive. She shared with God her greatest concern. Many times it is the offering of prayer, not the answer to prayer that brings peace. Peace is not the result of God answering prayer, but peace comes in the very act of turning to God in the first place. Hannah did not know if she would get an answer to her prayer, she did not know the outcome, but one thing she did know: God remembered her, and God listened to her as she poured out her soul. God will do the same for us; he comes to us on the level of our need. What God did for Hannah, God can do for us.