**Oregon City United Methodist Church Rev. Michael Benischek**

**18955 S. South End Road 503-522-9807**

**Oregon City, OR 97045 September 9, 2018**

**Series: Back to School**

**Sermon: Don’t Forget Me**

**I Samuel 1:9-18**

Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the Lord’s house. 10 In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. 11 And she made a vow, saying, “Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her 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.”

12 As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. 13 Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk 14 and said to her, “How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine.”

15 “Not so, my lord,” Hannah replied, “I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. 16 Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.”

17 Eli answered, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.”

18 She said, “May your servant find favor in your eyes.” Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

**Sermon**

If you have kids, do you remember dropping them off at school for the very first time? For years, you grew this little kiddo from nothing, into something. Maybe they had a few nights at grandma and grandpas along the way, but for the most part, they were yours. In your care. But there comes a time when you send them off to school. We did that last week. Good luck! On the sign at the elementary school is a message for the kindergartners. Welcome Class of 2031. That’ll make you feel old. And you see kids off to school for the very first time. And some kids don’t want to go. They hold on to mom or dad. But most trot on off. And some parents don’t want to let go. They want to hold on to daughter or son. And I get that. It’s weird - for years you were the number one care giver, maybe the only caregiver - and now they’ll spend a good portion of the day with people you don’t know. But its good for them. Its good for you. And we begin the slow decades long process of letting go. I heard one kid say to his mom, “Please don’t forget me.” And I wonder if that is the lament of some parents as well, “please don’t forget me.”

This is the lament of our scripture passage today. A woman, crying out to the Lord, please don’t forget me. This month, we’ll be looking at portions of the life of Samuel, out of the Old Testament. But today, Samuel isn’t even a gleam in his mother’s eye - but the lack of a child is a painful reminder of something that she wants. Her name is Hannah. For the Jewish people Hannah is a pivotal person when it comes to the area of prayer. On Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) her story is read as one of the most important passages of the day. Today we'll be looking at the first part of her story so we can gain an understanding about this remarkable woman and see what we take away from it.

The book of 1st Samuel starts by giving the background that led up to his birth. There was a man named Elkanah who had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah was able to produce children but Hannah was not. The not-so-nice Peninnah would provoke and irritate Hannah over it. I'm sure it was painful for Hannah to endure-having to watch the dynamic of loving children surrounding Peninnah and Elkanah and Hannah over there by herself. This went on for years. It got so bad at times that the Bible says that Hannah wept and wouldn't eat. Elkanah felt bad for her and would give her special blessings to show that he still loved her. He tried to cheer her up but it didn't work. Hannah was a sad and depressed woman. She couldn't give her husband any children and she no doubt felt rejected by God. So it didn't matter if her husband loved her if she thought God had rejected her she was going to remain inconsolable.

Every year they went up to the Temple to offer sacrifices. This is where our story begins today. Hannah went to the door of the temple alone, and in bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD. And she made a vow, saying, “Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her 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.” As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk and said to her, “How long will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine.” “Not so, my lord,” Hannah replied, “I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.”

Hannah wanted a son very badly. Have you ever wanted something so badly the intensity was marked in your prayers? I can picture Hannah praying something like, "God, it's been so long and Peninnah is so annoying! Listen, I can't take this anymore. If you give me a son I promise I'll bring him to the temple so he can serve your cause full time. I won't even keep him to myself...I'll give him back to you. Just please honor my desperate plea."

Hannah's prayer was so intense and emotional that Eli thought she was drunk! I like how Hannah addresses the Lord here-Lord Almighty. She believed in God's ability to open her womb. She calls upon the one who has all power to be mindful of her and bless her with the privilege of childbirth. But then she follows that up with something extraordinary. She makes a vow to give him back! By saying "give him to the Lord" and "no razor will ever be used on his head" she is committing him to be set apart with the Nazirite vow. You can read about that in Numbers, chapter 6 but it meant a special devotion to the Lord above the norm. And we'll see later that this means he would be brought to the temple to live and serve all the days of his life. This is the vow she is making. Can you imagine doing that? All the years of anguish and heartache due to not having a child and you decide that within your earnest prayer to have what you've longed for you promise the Lord that if he comes through you will sacrifice him to the temple service. It almost doesn't make sense, does it? Yet that's what we see Hannah doing.

Eli’s answer? “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.” She said, “May your servant find favor in your eyes.” Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast. Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the LORD and then went back to their home at Ramah. You’ll find out the rest of the story next week.

This is what I like about Hannah. First, she made worship personal. For years, they’ve been doing this. Coming to the Temple. Doing the same thing. Over and over. But this year, something changed. After supper Hannah went to the Tabernacle to pray and weep bitterly before the Lord. Why after all those years did Hannah decide to pray? Nothing had changed outwardly. Why this particular day? Maybe Elkanah's love changed her mind and Hannah realized that if her husband still loved her though she was barren, perhaps God also loved her. Deep, deep down inside of Hannah, buried under years of deferred hopes and dashed dreams was a kernel of faith, just enough to get her to the altar to plead in anguish before the only One who could change the situation. So she ran and opened the floodgates, no holds barred, as she wept honestly and profusely before God and asked God boldy for a son. Having been beaten down and disappointed, do you find it hard to boldly and specifically ask God for something in prayer? I know I do. But here Hannah was, at the lowest point in her life, offering up a request that she had probably thought a thousand times. Sometimes we don’t ask for things because we don’t think it’s possible. I wonder if we don’t receive some things because we don’t ask in the first place! Say it out loud. God hears the prayer in the heart, yes, but sometime try it out loud. Sometimes you get what you ask for! Its true for spouses and kids right? My mind-reading abilities are broken. Tell me what you want - you’d be amazed! If my wife loved me, she’d know what I want. Get real! Say it out loud. My kids should just know how to act! Get real. Verbalize. Verbalize. Verbalize. Don't give up on asking for what you most desire. After all these years, Hannah finds the courage to actually ask for what she wants.

Second thing I learn: Hannah found her peace, even before knowing how the story ended. Eli the priest finally realized Hannah was not drunk, but a God-fearing woman after all and blessed her by saying, "May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of him" And Hannah, satisfied with his response and finally at peace with herself and her Maker after wrestling in prayer, came out the other side, full of joy and renewed purpose. Though Hannah didn't know when she would conceive, she reacted as if she was completely healed. God healed not just her physical body so that she could bear children, but God also restored her spirit through renewed faith and her emotional state by giving her gladness. Isn't that just like God? He is concerned with the whole person -- body, mind, spirit, soul. And He is able to restore all parts of a person in due time. We find healing in sharing with others. God, friend, family, counselor. The random person on the street. I was going for a walk the other night and I was going by the police station. Lady standing out front on the sidewalk. Looks lost. Has a travel suitcase. I asked, you OK. Found out real fast, NOT OK. Her 18 year old son ran away, she’s looking for him to give him his medications. Cops know where he’s at, but won’t share, son didn’t want them to share - and he’s an adult. So she’s kinda up a creek. Got the whole story in 20 seconds. All I could say was “I’m not a creep, or a weirdo, but do you need a hug?” YES!!! I’m not taking sides in their little drama - but a hug gave a little grace in that moment. She said she felt a little better, not so alone. You can give someone a little boost if you keep your eyes out. I got home from the walk and Stephanie asked, how was your walk? Great, I ran into the Mormons, or the people formerly known as Mormons chatted with them for a while, hit Walgreens, and then, uh, hugged a random lady. “You have weird walks.” Yes, yes I do.

And the last thing I’ll share this morning - and you’ve probably figured it out already. Hannah did give birth. She had a son she named Samuel. And with this birth, God, through Eli, kept His promise. And Hannah, kept her promise as well. After a year of weaning the babe, Hannah fulfilled her vow by giving young Samuel to Eli's care. What a testimony! Hannah quickly learned how to hold onto God's provisions loosely, recognizing that all things are God's and are best when given back to Him. She didn't argue with God or go back on her vow. She didn't tell God that she didn't mean what she said that day. She fulfilled her promise, willingly. Hannah understood a principle that we as Christians must remember: we are given life to give it away. We pour out what God has given us -- our talents, our gifts, our money, our joy, whatever it may be -- as a blessing to the nations.

When we do this, we are not only following in Hannah's footsteps, but we are also following in the footsteps of the greatest figure ever to walk the earth: Jesus. God gave His Son, Jesus, away to be raised up as a blessing to the nations with his gift of life and grace. Jesus, descendant of King David. King David, who was anointed King by the prophet Samuel. Samuel, who came about because of a hope and a prayer of a woman’s lament. Hannah: in Hebrew Hannah means favor or grace. For years she did not feel that way. She felt forgotten. But she was not forgotten. And neither are we. And the family of God said, AMEN.