

Sunday, October 1, 2023

First Lesson: Matthew 7:7

Second Lesson: 1 Samuel 2: 1-10

Sermon Series: Prayers that Move Mountains- Hannah  
Week 3

Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

- We are continuing with week 3 of our 4-week sermon series called, “Prayers that Move Mountains.” This is a sermon series that will use our First Lesson of Matthew 7:7 that we just heard and that will serve as the central theme of the sermon series; “Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you;” and see how it manifests itself in each focused prayer of study for the week, with the hope that our discoveries will speak to our life situations and experiences of today.

- In addition, the sermon format for how we will engage in conversation each week will be by applying the Wesleyan Quadrilateral Model as a tool, to ensure that how we are engaging our scriptures are thorough and exhaustive;
- For just a quick recap on what this Wesleyan quadrilateral model is; The United Methodist Church, asserts that “John Wesley believed that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, **illuminated by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason.**
- Therefore, this morning what we are asking, seeking, and knocking on the door for, is for a deeper connection and understanding for where our scriptural lesson of focus is coming from this morning in which I will name to **be Hannah’s Prayer.**

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- So to begin with both the **scripture and tradition aspect** of Hannah's prayer; as today my presentation of Hannah's story will weave in and out between the two in our Wesleyan quadrilateral model— it is important to name that although what is before us is indeed a prayer, stylistically what we are reading is not just a prayer, but a hymn.
- For scholars will note that Hannah is actually singing— in which her song is offered to us as the only response to her experience of God's wondrous grace.
- Thereby revealing to us, **verses of a song of praise and thanksgiving**, by a barren woman whose womb has been opened.
- The language in verse 1 is the language of personal praise to God, in which Hannah expresses this praise in naming that she has obtained victory over her enemy.

- Who is the enemy Hannah is referring to?
- In our applying the Sermon to life class on Wednesday, having preached on Hannah roughly 10 years ago, I shared with the class that I believed that the enemy Hannah was referring to was her arch nemesis Penninah—
- For those who were in the class, I stopped by to name that according to most biblical scholars also interpreting the scriptural text, I am absolutely correct on this- that part of this, is a prayer that refers to a person who has been terrorized by someone so much, that it kept her pretty much bound up with frustration, grief, turmoil...you name it?
- For if any of us has ever been terrorized by someone before, this should allow us to lean into Hannah's story that much further;

- For in naming who Hannah and Peninnah are in this context, I need to really paint the triangle for us that begins with a man named Elkanah.
- For one should note that Elkanah is the name of a couple of men in the Bible ([Exodus 6:24](#); [1 Chronicles 6:23](#)).
- The better-known Elkanah of whom I am talking about was the father of the prophet Samuel ([1 Samuel 1:1–8](#); [1 Chronicles 6:25–26](#)).
- The name Elkanah means “God has created” or “God has taken possession.”
- The Bible describes this Elkanah as the son of Jeroham, from the tribe of Levi, living in the [days of the judges](#) ([Judges 17:6](#)).
- Therefore Elkanah had two wives, Peninnah and Hannah;
- Where Penninah and Elkanah had children together, but Hannah was barren.

- Traditionally, despite the fact that in those days a wife's value was tied to her childbearing abilities,
- Elkanah loved Hannah and was grieved for her sadness.
- For as it is in most relationships like these that exists in the Bible, there was often rivalry between the two women involved; Sarah and Hagar (Genesis 16), Rachel and Leah (Genesis 30), and Euodia and Syntyche (Phillipians 4); to just name a few.
- I would be remiss if I did not say that sadly, this competitive model exists in our society today;
- For as I weave in my human experience for just a moment in confidence that this will resonate with some, I stopped by to say that **my first broken heart** did not come from a failed romantic relationship...
- **My first broken heart** in which the wound never seems to quite fully heal, has often been at the

hand of these competitive models and maneuvers that seem to persist amongst women;

- To amplify my experience; I came across an article online entitled, *Woman and Competition: The ugly truth about female relationships* by Sharon Hodde Miller who stated:

*Today I read an article that made me very sad. It was written by a woman whom I respect, though we disagree on some things. This particular article (about which I will not disclose any more details than what I have here) arrived at some conclusions that I do not share, but what disappointed me was the author's tone. It was not loving toward other women. Going beyond disagreement, she was sarcastic and condescending. Rather than respectfully disagreeing, this usually mature woman in Christ chose to belittle women who take a different position than hers.*

*That behavior is wrong. It is not Christlike, and as women of the church we need to be better than that.*

*Whenever women back-bite in the name of theological or ideological difference, Satan wins a small victory. While our own sense of self-righteousness often justifies this behavior in our minds, mud-slinging and ridicule are always unfitting for the church. Throughout history, tremendous destruction has resulted*

*from rifts between women, so we need to take this problem very seriously.*

- And so it would be, this is the context from where Hannah's prayer initially was coming from;
- A woman who was broken-hearted because she could not have a child;
- A woman's wound that could not fully heal, because she was constantly being terrorized by another woman who rejoiced at her misfortune.
- For Peninnah taunted Hannah about her childlessness year after year until Hannah could take it no more.
- Leaving Hannah to not only ask, seek and knock for some relief towards God to bless her with a child, but in looking closely at our text, Hannah



was also seeking relief from this constant terrorization from Penninah.

- In which all of this new knowledge may give some of us tremendous pause and theological concerns for us to consider, whether such a prayer is a proper prayer to bring to God at all!
- For in drawing from Last Week's prayer that focused on the Lord's Prayer, in which we looked at the Gospel Matthew 6:9-13; the story tells us that Jesus informed the disciple; **“Pray then, in this way: *Our Father in heaven, may your name be revered as holy; may your kingdom come, may your will e done on earth as it is in heaven....and so forth* (refer to sermon 2 in this series for the full engagement of the Lord's Prayer),**
- Therefore, inquiring minds may then look at Hannah's prayer and think, **“Hannah, God said pray then in this way;”**

- God didn't say to pray for a comeuppance to come against Penninah!
- Not to mention, taking in the context where most scholars again would believe that Hannah's prayer is coming from;
- **A woman** who ultimately gets her prayer answered because she is granted a child;
- A woman who must have felt vindicated from the verbal insults from Penninah, because now she is able to proclaim a newfound strength and confidence in becoming a mother—
- Another major theological concern for us to wrestle with is what happens to those prayers in which a person does not get what they asked for;
- In drawing from my personal experience again, I asked God to spare my father from pancreatic cancer, and he has gone from this side of the Jordan for almost 10 years;

- I am certain that a lot of us may have prayed for what we wanted and did not either get the answer we wanted or gotten what we asked for.
- And this is when I would like to tap into the **reasoning** part of our Wesleyan quadrilateral and name that it has long been recognized from biblical scholars who have studied this prayer for centuries now, that the reference of this prayer or hymn is broader than Hannah's barrenness and the birth of Samuel, or the complex competitive drama triangle that existed between this trio;
- For the main point that Hannah's prayer addresses implicitly to us in 2023, is how a person transforms from being in a place of "my will" and transforms into a posture of "thy will".
- For what we are seeing in this prayer of Hannah I submit, is how the Lord's Prayer moves into a

prayer of just words—into a prayer that becomes action!

- For it is shortly after this prayer, that tradition will take us through a journey of how Hannah moves from a place of being **simply Samuel's mother, into essentially becoming the mother of Israel.**
- For I stopped by to also proclaim that although the prayer/hymn before us on the surface, has some raw human elements of grief, vengeance, vindication and praise that could once again be questionable as to whether this is how we should pray to God;
- I would be remiss if I did not also say that Hannah made a promise to God which is found in 1 Samuel 1:11, that declared to God in her cry for relief; "Lord Almighty, look at me, your servant! See my trouble and remember me! Don't forget me! If you give me a son, I promise

that I will dedicate him to you for his whole life and that he will never have his hair cut,”

- **It was a prayer** that a person could initially think was just a bargaining prayer that Hannah never really meant;
- However, towards the end of Hannah’s prayer/ song right around verse 10, when she sings *God will give strength to God’s king and exalt the power of God’s anointed;*”
- Most Biblical scholars denote that the king that Hannah is referring to, is a prophetic lens to whom this son she has given back to God would become; for her son Samuel would become one of the greatest kings in Israel.
- Thereby making the good news for this tradition of Israel being that Israel’s fortunes, like Hannah’s, can be reversed!

- For the prayer/song of Hannah's is intended to broaden our horizons beyond that of Hannah's personal story;
- For her song speaks of a whole catalog of reversals that are possible through the power of God;
- Where weakness is made into strength,
- The lowly made exalted, the hungry filled,
- The poor made rich,
- The barren given children;
- Furthermore, for those of us who are still unsure how to actually pray to God, we see how virtually there is no wrong way we can pray to God;
- For what can be seen in Hannah's story is that when you and I choose to open up our mouths *to ask, seek and knock to the God* of the highest, we observe how a person can start one way in their conversation with God, and God still use that

person wherever they are and bring divinity forth through them!

- For all God needs from us is a willingness and an invitation for God to enter into our situation and circumstance—and the rest is left up to God;
- For similar to the metaphor of what one of our classmates provided on Wednesday night by way of a chiropractor that might enhance our theological reasoning that much further;
- The ultimate role of a chiropractor, is to evaluate and treat patients' neuromusculoskeletal system, which includes nerves, bones, muscles, ligaments, and tendons.
- In researching how a chiropractor would go about aligning someone's spine for instance that is out of alignment so that they can walk properly; I learned that chiropractors use their

- hands or a small instrument to apply a controlled, sudden force to a spinal joint;
- Thereby making the chiropractor's goal of this procedure, to improve spinal motion and improve our body's physical function;
  - And so as I preach this sermon home, when you and I come to God in prayer by way of asking, seeking and knocking;
  - The spiritual chiropractor goes to work immediately on us in a similar way;
  - For where the Spirit of the Lord's hands starts to work on us as I draw from the Aramaic words of the Lord's prayer from last week; when we pray, God begins to immediately *focus God's light within us — to make us useful: as the rays of a beacon to show the way.*
  - **From there God's hands** then starts to work on our minds, *to Unite our "I can" to God's, so*



*that we walk as kings and queens with every creature.*

- **God's hands then moves to our heart**—*to Create in us a divine cooperation — from many selves, one voice, one action.*
- **God's hands then move to our mouths**—*so that we can begin to proclaim and forgive our hidden past, the secret shames, as we consistently forgive what others hide.*
- **God's hands finally move** into our entire being and body— propelling us to become the force of all ruling will, the power and life to do, the song that beautifies all from age to age it renews;
- Furthermore, just as I learned with chiropractic adjustments, the body can become so used to being out of alignment, that when the body is put into alignment for the first time, it may feel a bit achy or sore in your joints;

- The recommendation is that the soreness should go away in a few days; not to mention that it may take a few days to notice any changes at all in your body;
- But the advice that applies to our prayer lives in this metaphor is exactly the same; stick to your chiropractor's treatment plan, regardless of how you're feeling post-adjustment...it's imperative—
- For this is truly the only way that our spiritual bodies will get into alignment;
- For the kingdom, the power, and the glory is  
Yours forever...Amen