

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
June 5, 2011**

1 Samuel 1

What Are You Waiting For?

- 1. Hannah's situation**
- 2. Our lessons from her**

**Hymns: 752 – 507 – Distribution: 413, 435,
403 – 332**

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

“What are you waiting for?!” Have you ever been asked that question?

What does that question usually mean? It means “What’s the delay? Get going!” It’s usually asked by:

- A parent of a high school student, whose son or daughter is putting off starting their big report for the semester. “What are you waiting for?!”
- Or asked by the friends of a young man who is going out with a very nice young lady, and who is delaying (for some reason) asking for her hand in marriage. “What are you waiting for?!”

Today, we are asking the same question as we read this sermon text: “What are you waiting for?” But we’re asking it in a different sense. We’re asking it of ourselves. We’re asking it seriously and introspectively: “What are you waiting for?” It’s not an easy thing to wait on the Lord, and many days in this world we are frustrated by trials and circumstances. **As we ask this question today, let’s use the**

story of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1 to focus our thoughts. Let’s see:

- 1. Hannah’s situation**
- 2. Our lessons we can learn from her**

1 – We read about Hannah’s life in our first two Scripture lessons. To fully grasp her frustrations as she waited on the Lord, we need to dig in and learn some deep (and sad) details. The first striking detail that jumps out at us is that Hannah was barren. The Lord had closed her womb. I’ve known a number of married couples who have not conceived a child and desperately want to. The frustration and the pain runs deep. Tears are shed. It’s a frustration that many of us here can imagine and can sympathize with, but cannot fully feel. Add to Hannah’s misery the fact that in OT times this was considered quite shameful. It was painfully clear to all that the Lord was not granting her children, and people would wonder why.

Add to this the polygamous situation in the household. Many commentators feel that Elkanah took a second wife, Peninnah, because he needed an heir, and children were not coming from Hannah. Was it right for him to do this? We know that God’s rules for marriage have always been “one man and one woman becoming one flesh.” God did not condone this. Yet as the book of Judges says more than once, at that time everyone did what seemed right in their own eyes and this is what Elkanah sadly chose to do.

If we ever wonder whether God’s marriage design includes polygamy, look how this situation turns out. Peninnah chose to be Hannah’s thorn in her side, her rival. 1 Samuel 1:6 says, “*Her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her.*” This is a vivid sentence in the Hebrew language.

- Her “*rival*” – This is the word for enemy. It’s the only time in the

Bible this word is used of a female in this sense. Her enemy was in her own house!

- “*Provoke*” – This verb has the sense of “to vex, to make angry, to provoke to wrath.” Have you ever had a person that just liked to push your buttons in a mean, deliberate way? Add to this that the Hebrew adds the same noun after the verb to emphasize this: “She vexed her vexation.”
- It then adds a little word that intensifies the sentence – In English it’s an “indeed” or an “even.”
- “*To irritate her*” – The word used here is actually the word for “thunder!” Peninnah tried to make Hannah blow her stack.

The phrase is: “**Her enemy vexed her vexation – indeed – in order to make her thunder...**”

Would you have enjoyed life in your own home if you had been Hannah?

Let’s add more to Hannah’s misery. Her enemy especially heaped on the persecution at festival time. This festival that’s mentioned in 1 Samuel 1 seems to be the Feast of Tabernacles, which commemorated God’s care of the Israelites during their wilderness wanderings and was a time to pray for his blessing on the coming year’s crops. It was a festive, happy time. Every year at this time, Elkanah took the whole family to the tabernacle at Shiloh for a sacrifice which included a fellowship meal. But holiday time was not a happy time for Hannah. Verse 7 says, “*Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat.*” Even at this special meal and celebration, Peninnah would not lay off!

Let’s add one more detail to Hannah’s situation. Verse 7 also says, “*This went on year after year.*” Do those words jump off the page at you? “Year after year?!” We don’t know how many years Hannah had to endure the vicious taunting of Peninnah. God did not ride in with the cavalry and fix the problem overnight. It went on for years! Have you been waiting for God to do that certain something for years? Have you been waiting for an answer to a specific request? If you can answer, “Yes, I have,” you are in the good company of Hannah. If we would have asked her, “What are you waiting for?” it’s obvious what she would have said.

What did Hannah do about her situation? Verse 9 said, “*Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the LORD’s temple. In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD.*” After the fellowship meal one year, Hannah excuses herself to go to the tabernacle to pray. I’d imagine she had prayed about this long and hard already, and she took the opportunity while in Shiloh to pray at the house of worship. Look at the way in which she prays this important prayer. We just read that she prayed:

- In bitterness of soul – This ongoing issue in her life had hurt deep!
- Weeping in anguish – As we read these verses, whose prayer does this sound like from Scripture? It sounds very similar to Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane before he was arrested and put on trial. What a heartfelt, agonizing prayer this was!

We hear more about Hannah’s prayer:

- Verse 12 says that “*she kept on praying to the LORD*” – Her prayer persistently went on and on.
- Verse 13 says that she “*was praying in her heart,*” with her lips moving but without voicing her words. Her heart was really into her prayer.
- When Eli the priest questions her behavior, which doesn’t seem to be like many other pray-er’s behavior, she says, “*I was pouring out my soul to the LORD.*”

We have to note one other important detail with her prayer. Verse 18 says, “*Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.*” After she had prayed and laid out her heart and soul to God, she went her way in contentment and faith. She knew God had listened and would answer according to his will.

In his time, God answered Hannah’s prayer as she had requested. She became pregnant and had a son. This is a good reminder to us that fathers are not the source of life. God is the source and author of life, and “*sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him,*” as Psalm 127 says.

We see quite a reaction from Hannah. In chapter 2 she sings a song that is much like Mary’s Magnificat in the New Testament when she visited Elizabeth. The beginning of Hannah’s song says, “*My heart rejoices in the LORD; in the LORD my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance. “There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.”*”

She named him Samuel, which means “heard of God.” As she vowed, he would be a Nazarite, an Israelite with a special vow to the LORD to never cut his hair, have contact with the dead, or drink alcohol. And then in the ultimate sacrifice, she gave him back to the Lord. We read how she weaned Samuel before she went back to Shiloh to give him to the priest to serve full time at God’s house. Samuel would have been about three years old when he went to be Eli’s apprentice. What a sacrifice this was. Parents, you get to take your children home with you today!

Hannah brought a generous sacrifice and gift when she dedicated Samuel to God’s service and brought him to Eli. With an emotion we can sense, she recounted her prayer to Eli and joyfully tells him how God gave her a son that she is giving back. And in chapter 2 we hear that every year Hannah made Samuel a new priestly robe to wear as he served God there.

To bring this story to a close, we see that God was not done. Hannah’s sacrifice was not one made in vain. The ministry of Samuel was one of the most important ministries in the Bible. Under his leadership Israel renounced idolatry for a time. Samuel founded a “school of the prophets.” Samuel mentored the first two kings of Israel as their anointer and spiritual guide. And, as for Hannah? We hear that God gave her five more children. I’d imagine this ended Peninnah’s needling her about this topic!

2 – Why are we focusing on this today? There’s a reason this text comes up on this particular Sunday. We are worshiping on the last Sunday in the Easter season, the only Easter Sunday after the ascension of Christ, which we commemorated last weekend. The theme for this Sunday is summed up well by the words from the year’s worship calendar:

“Live in eager expectation of glory... not dimmed by earthly suffering... first the cross; then the crown. Our light and momentary trouble cannot mute the joy of living in eager expectation of glory... (This week) is one of waiting and expectation for the promised Spirit and the promised glory.”

We have reached the time of year when Jesus has left this world. Nothing more needs to be done to win our salvation. He has died on the cross for you and ascended back into heaven. What is left now? Today we recognize that we are in a world corrupted by sin and a world full of tribulations for us, living in the end times and simply waiting for him to come deliver us. And hardships will come for God’s people as we wait. Yet we see glory coming to God’s people at Pentecost and at the end of time.

Hannah is a great example to focus on today. Her life has many applicable thoughts to the situation our worship calendar describes. What lessons can we learn from her? I’d submit that we can learn a few.

First, we learn a lesson in patience. What trials in this sinful world and in your personal life weigh heavy upon you? And how long have you borne them? Our trials can be many and varied:

- Do you have a rival in the world who is persecuting you? We do hear that the righteous will have to suffer for their faith at times. Is it happening to you?
- Is there a physical ailment that serves as a cross in your life that God has allowed? Have you struggled with it for some time?
- Is there a circumstance that you must bear? Has it gone on “year

after year?” Will it continue for years?

- Is it something at work?
- Was it something with the school year that just ended?
- Is it something in your family? Or extended relatives?

How has your patience been? Have you had the words of the psalmist in your mind when he says, “*Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.*” Or have you chafed and fretted under the yoke? Have you questioned God concerning his wisdom? If so, think of Hannah and pray for God’s forgiveness.

Secondly, we undoubtedly learn a lesson about prayer from Hannah. Does your prayer life mirror hers? Or does it pale in comparison? When was the last time you prayed in anguish, from the depths of your heart and soul? How often are you persistent like Hannah in prayer? Or, have you needed to hear the words of Jesus: “*Could you not keep watch with me for one hour?*” Do you forget to pray? Are you too busy to pray? Do you dismiss your weakness with: “Prayer’s just not a gift of mine”? Are the main prayers you pray the one-line prayers at the end of the *Meditations* devotion booklet? Have you quit praying? If so, think of Hannah and pray for God’s forgiveness.

Third, we can learn a joyful lesson from Hannah about God’s vindication and deliverance. Psalm 135 says, “*The LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants.*” Vindication comes to you in a couple different ways. First, when your conscience torments you because of the lack of patience and prayer in your life, think of Hannah’s sacrifice. She brought a three-year old bull to God’s house for her sacrifice. Those OT sacrifices pictured the One who would come into the

world to sacrifice his life for your sins. In Hannah's sacrifice we see Jesus prefigured as the Savior of the world, the one who would shed his blood for your forgiveness. Take heart! You are forgiven of your sins!

We also see God's vindication and deliverance for his people at the end of the world, when God will deliver us completely from this world's oppression. It's happening because a Son is coming, no mere earthly son, but the Son of God who will return gloriously to judge all people and bring you safely to heaven. Rejoice!

As we close our look at these deep lessons from Hannah in Scripture today, I should mention our communion hymns. Much thought goes into the hymns and music picked out for our worship services, and the hymns during communion today are no exception. Take note of them when we sing them. They were written by poets who knew the troubles of a Christian's life well. It's obvious in their words. But they also knew of the comfort that God had for them in their troubles now and also at the end of time.

May our comfort be the same as their and as Hannah's as we worship today at the end of this Easter season. God will vindicate and deliver us! Amen.