



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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October 9, 2011

Different Gifts, Same Grace - Week 3

Sermon Text: [1 Samuel 2:18-21](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [1 Samuel 2:18-21](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 73](#)

Second Lesson: [Colossians 4:6-8](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 1:39-45](#)

Encouraged Through the Gospel

How well do you know the story of Hannah that I just read to you? I just read a little portion of it, right? How well do you know her story? It's in 1 Samuel, the first couple of chapters, the book the Holy Spirit used her son, Samuel, to write. The first few chapters only take a little bit of time to read. You could probably read them during the commercials of some football game you are watching today. So maybe sometime today, read through it. Take a look at it. It's fascinating. Especially if you read through it and put yourself in Hannah's shoes as you read through it and think about what she must have been going through.

Hannah was married to Elkanah; we heard his name in what I read to you. But Elkanah had another wife, and that wife had children. Hannah had none. The one thing she dearly wanted was a son, but she had none. You know how within families and family dynamics we all know how to push each other's buttons at times? We know what to say to irritate one another to get one another going when we are upset. Elkanah's other wife knew how to get Hannah going. She just had to start talking about kids, right? Every year they would go to where the tabernacle was, where Eli was the high priest, and they'd offer the sacrifices and have the fellowship meal with their portion of the meat. The one year, like had happened before, Elkanah's other wife pushed the "you don't have any kids" button. And Hannah was so grieved, so torn up inside, so irritated, frustrated, any other "...ated" you could think of, that she wouldn't eat, pushed the food away, and her husband said, "Come on. You know I love you. Am I not worth more to you than ten sons" when trying to console his wife, who he dearly loved. He said he loved her more than the other one, so why he had two, I don't know. But he couldn't console her. There was no consolation. This is where her heart was.

Put yourself in her shoes now. This is where your heart is and year after year you have that other woman that just keeps pushing those buttons. You're frustrated and you're irritated and when she's there at the tabernacle, she's outside the entrance around the outside, and she's praying so fervently, "Lord, give me a son. And if you give me a son, I'll give him to you and I'll let him serve you in this place." She's praying so fervently. She's not saying a word, but her lips are moving as though she's praying. Eli, the high priest, sees her. This gives you an idea of what the situation was like around the tabernacle there. He goes up to her and says, "Get rid of your wine and go home, you drunk!" He thinks she's just loaded. That tells you what the condition was like around there, right?

She says, “No, no, you have to understand, man of God. I’m not drunk. I’m praying because the Lord hasn’t given me a son and I dearly want a son, and I’ve vowed to give him the son.” Eli says, “May you go home and may the Lord give to you what you have asked for.” No doubt Eli must have been moved by what he had seen, because evidently he didn’t see it all that often.

Lo and behold the Lord answers her prayer and she has this son. She calls this son Samuel. Samuel means “heard of God.” “God heard and answered my prayer.” Heard of God; God heard it and answered it. That name itself is the recognition that God didn’t owe this to her. I believe she knew that God didn’t owe her a son just because she had prayed fervently and made a vow. That wasn’t her belief that she twisted God’s arms into doing this for her. Heard of God is emphasizing that it’s a gift of God’s grace.

So then she says, “I’ll still keep my word. I’ll give this son to the Lord. After I have weaned him, then I’ll take him and give him to the Lord.” That would be 3-6 years in those days according to what I’ve read. So no doubt she teaches him about the Lord and about how gracious God is and how he was an answer to her prayers and how God had given him as a special child and the God of grace and the God of mercy and all these things. Can you think of what she must have felt like when she was making that last trip to where the tabernacle is and she knows this time she’s not coming back with that son? This time she’s leaving him there and he’s just a little kid. Can you imagine what was going through her mind?

I said things around the tabernacle weren’t so good. Eli’s sons were less than desirable characters. They were stealing from the offerings, taking what they wanted from it instead of doing what the priests had done that served under the high priest, and Eli wasn’t doing anything about it. They were forcing themselves upon and having sex with the women that served at the temple gates. So Eli, the high priest, doesn’t seem to have done a great job with his kids. Now you are taking your kid there to live under him? What are you thinking? What are you feeling? Do you think Hannah got any blowback from people? “Why you doing that? You know what those guys are like? You want your kid growing up where?”

Do you want to know what was on her heart? When she took Samuel, she offered a prayer. Think again about what would be on your heart as you are about to leave your son, the son that is “heard of God,” the special answer to this prayer, you are about to leave him behind with Eli, and you’re going to pray. What are you saying? “Lord preserve him from this rotten high priest.” Here’s her prayer, at the start of Chapter 2:

“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.”

Is that the prayer you would compose in your heart? I have to bet not, right? “My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn (my strength) is lifted high.” That’s an amazing prayer of faith, isn’t it? She was encouraged by God’s grace, by God’s gift of grace. She trusted that the God who gave her that son would keep all of his promises, including a Savior from sin, and she trusted that God would take care of him. Without the Spirit of God, or when we are thinking without the Spirit guiding our thoughts, we probably would tell her she’s nuts to trust God with something like that.

We’d be wrong. In this case the Lord certainly blessed Samuel. He became the last judge, ruler of Israel, he was a prophet faithful to God, and he served God faithfully all of his life. Every year his mom would come back and encourage him, give him that little linen ephod. An ephod was a robe-like linen that the priests wore, and here’s cute little Samuel running around in his new ephod that she sewed him every year. But I think some of the greatest encouragement she gave her son was teaching him about the Lord’s grace during those years that she had him in her home. She certainly kept God’s command through the Books of Moses to teach these truths to your children. She didn’t rely on someone else. She did it. Samuel ministered faithfully before the Lord all these times.

Someone that stays close to the Lord that is encouraged by the Gospel is going to encourage others with words of grace and acts of unconditional love like you see Hannah do for Samuel. That doesn’t mean it’s always easy. I have to think there were probably nights when Hannah tossed and turned and thought about her child that was far away. But I have to believe where she continued to find her encouragement was in God’s promises, in God’s love, in God’s unconditional love and his unconditional grace.

It’s the same way for you and me as we seek to encourage one another in the Body of Christ because we belong to one another. That’s what God says. Those are his words, not mine. If you don’t think that your gifts and your skills are there to benefit other people in the Body of Christ, you are arguing with God. You’re not arguing with me. He makes it so clear in his Word. Each member belongs to all the others within the Body of Christ. So each member who has been encouraged by the Gospel is there to encourage others with the Gospel, just like we saw Hannah do.

We’ve been encouraged by the Gospel. We know what sinful wretches we are. We know that we don’t deserve forgiveness from God. We can’t twist God’s arm and bribe him and say, “Lord, I’ll go to church every week. You just take away my sins. I’ll do my part. You do yours.” That isn’t how it works. God loves us and forgives us because he is love. That’s his very nature. He left heaven. He became one of us. He lived in our place. He died in our place. He gives us the gift of Baptism, the gift of the Word, the gift of the Lord’s Supper so that we can stay close to him, so that we can be continually encouraged by his Gospel, and so that we can use it to encourage one another.

Encourage one another. If your gift is encouraging, encourage one another. If your spiritual gift is not encouraging, there are plenty of other places in Scripture where God tells you, encourage one another. “Let’s not give up meeting together, as some are in

the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (See [Hebrews 10:24-25](#).) The only thing that encourages you and I to face Judgment Day is the Gospel. So that’s what God has given us to encourage one another.

Is that what you are using? Is that what you are using to encourage one another? Think about it. Do we often just fall short of using this great source of power and strength and love that is our God and we see someone that is struggling, we see someone that is hurting, and we tell them “Hang in there. It will get better.” Is that really the best we can do? We see someone that is going to have surgery and we tell them, “It will go fine.” You don’t know that it will go fine. Don’t make promises you can’t keep. We don’t know what the future will bring. We can’t tell everyone it will be alright.

Why do we stop with stuff like that... “hang in there, it’ll get better.” Well that makes me feel good when I’m feeling crushed. But we do that, don’t we? Sometimes we even use the Law as Christian encouragement with one another. “What’s the matter with you? Why are you struggling? Don’t you love God enough?” Have you ever had anyone say that to you? I’ve had our members say it to me. Love God...is that a Gospel statement, or a Law statement? It’s Law. The Law doesn’t encourage; the Law crushes. It shows me how little I love my God compared to what he has done for me.

The tool God has given you and I to encourage one another is the Gospel of Jesus Christ; to say “I don’t know what the surgery is going to bring, but I know this. I know this for a fact. Your God loves you. He loved you enough to stretch out his arms on a cross and die for you. He loves you enough to be with you through everything you are going through.” Don’t just assume the Gospel. Don’t just assume the other person knows that truth. Speak it. Encourage them with it. That’s the power that our God has given us. Why are we going to leave it on the shelf and just assume someone else knows it? Tell one another God loves them. Tell one another God forgives them. Tell one another God is thrilled to be close to them because he loved him so much he died for them. And encourage them. Don’t guilt them. Don’t shame them. Encourage them with the Gospel.

It pains me at times when we use other things besides the Gospel, or when we give off this impression that it’s not our problem; that’s not what we are supposed to be doing.

Many of you know my mom. My dad died a few years ago in our house. My mom’s a widow at home and doesn’t have as many people to talk to now. Some of her friends from her church have made it clear to her, when they talk about other people, that “I have enough problems of my own. I don’t want to hear someone else’s problems.” Those are her close friends in church, so who is she left to talk to when she has struggles and worries now? Yeah, I know we all have enough problems of our own and we don’t really want to hear other people’s problems, but God has called us to hear one another’s problems and to help and encourage one another. God has given us the Gospel to do it.

It isn't all about me. It isn't all about you. That's the spirit that says "I have enough problems of my own. I don't want to hear your problems." Isn't it? "I love me, so you're on your own."

God loves them and us, and he wants us to encourage one another. So by all means, stay close to God in his Gospel, in his Word, in his Sacraments; contemplate your own sin, as tough as that is to do, and then rejoice that God has taken it away. But then, don't just hold that to yourself. Share that forgiveness and that love with one another. That's what we're here for.