

Stewardship Sunday – Different Gifts, Same Grace – Jan 15, 2012 Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY  
Based on 1Samuel 1:19-28 written by Pastor Paul Horn

**"Encouraged with the Gospel"**

How well do you know this story about Elkanah and Hannah and the little boy Samuel? Probably not very well. It's not among the assigned lessons for Sunday mornings. And how many Christians pick 1Samuel as their first choice for their daily devotional reading?

The opening verses of 1Samuel tell us that a man by the name of Elkanah was from the hill country of Ephraim, a territory just north of Jerusalem. The Bible tells that Elkanah and his two wives made an annual trip to a town called Shiloh. There was the tabernacle. The tabernacle was the tent that the LORD had Moses construct for the purposes of worship. The men of Israel were required to attend certain annual festivals at the tabernacle. This particular festival that Elkanah and his wives attended was time of joy and feasting. They brought sacrifices to burn on the altar to thank God for blessing their harvest.

As we read further in the chapter there was not much for Hannah to celebrate. As I said, Elkanah had two wives. The one wife was blessed with children. Hannah had no children. In those days to be childless was an insult. Children were a continuation of the family tree. They provided security for years to come. They took over the family business of either farming or ranching and ensured that land that LORD gave to each Israelite as their inheritance would continue for generations to come. And every year they made the trip to Shiloh, and every year Hannah's rival, Elkanah's other wife, would provoke her and tease her, until one year Hannah had had enough. At the feast Hannah broke down in tears and refused to eat. Her husband asked her, "Why are you not eating? Why are you crying? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

Hannah got up, went to the tabernacle and the tears began pouring down, and she prayed earnestly to the LORD. She prayed for a son and said, "and I will give him to [you] for all the days of his life." Then she went away and ate something. The next morning, they got up, worshiped and went back home.

That same box of Kleenex that Hannah had been using to dry her tears of sadness was soon used for tears of gladness. The LORD allowed Hannah to conceive, and nine months later, a little baby boy named Samuel was cradled her arms.

Now, remember... what had Hannah prayed to the LORD at the tabernacle? "If you remember me and give me a son, I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life." After years of waiting and years of the teasing, years of humiliation and embarrassment, and now you have a son, and you're going to give him up, just like that?

Our lesson reads, "After he was weaned she took the boy with her, young as he was, and brought him to the house of LORD at Shiloh. She said to the priest, Eli, "I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD." All her life she wanted a little boy whose chubby cheeks she could squeeze, the noise of his crying must have sounded like a symphony in her ears, and now... she leaves him. How heavy her heart must have been!

But listen to her song! "My heart rejoices in the LORD!" The source of Hannah's joy was not in the child, but in the LORD who had answered her prayer. And so she leaves him in the custody of the priest and those working at the tabernacle. Scripture tells us, "Samuel was ministering before the Lord—a boy wearing a linen ephod" (1 Samuel 2:18). An ephod was a close-fitting sleeveless pullover, garment worn by those who served at the tabernacle. Scripture tells us then, "Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice."

Each pass of the needle was done with thanks and praise in her heart. How proud her mother's heart was to bring this little robe to Samuel each year for him to wear as he served the Lord! She was going to make the most of her opportunity to encourage her son in his service to the Lord. A bond between a mother and a son, a bond built on God's promise, a bond built on the encouragement of the Word of

God. I'm sure they both looked forward to that visit each year, the time when Hannah could encourage her son in his ministry with the gifts that she had.

The Holy Spirit gives gifts to his Church – the gift of people. He gives gifts to all of the members of his Church so they can serve. The gift we want to look at today is the gift of encouraging. God also gives us opportunities to use the gift of encouragement – Paul said in Philippians, "You are created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

We have opportunities to encourage here at Faith Lutheran. This past November I challenged you that we would work together so that in six months 90% of our communicant members would be active in worship – that's this April we have to accomplish that goal. It's an opportunity for you and me to invite inactive members who have strayed from faithful worship and Bible study. God has given all of us this responsibility. Have you taken that challenge seriously? Have you used the tools provided for you, the new stewardship calendar, and made prayer time for church members a priority in your busy schedule? Have you taken the time to reach out to those brothers and sisters?

You have the opportunity to serve on committees and boards. It happens with church work that there are as many different opinions as there are bricks in this building. It's wise for us to listen to everyone's opinion, gather consensus, and do what is best for God's kingdom. Could there be a right way and wrong way to share those opinions? Paul said in our Second Lesson, "Let your conversation be seasoned with salt, always full of grace." Yet during meetings, or even after the meeting when we go home, do we find ourselves shouting, complaining, whining, pouting, accusing and our tongues are spiked instead with vinegar?

We have the opportunity to welcome all who come to worship their Lord here, especially children. On the first page of our bulletin it says, "We're glad you're here!" We recognize that parents are trying to raise their children in the training and instruction of the Lord. At times we know little ones can be noisy. When they become distracting to other worshipers, parents know to take them out, use the quiet room, and bring them back in when they are calm. But are we encouraging those parents and those children by turning around to see who is making noise and make a sour face or by shushing those children?

It's discouraging when we do and say these things, because it seems we have forgotten who we are – children of God. We forget who these people in the pews are – children of God. Then, aren't we in danger of forgetting who our God is and what he's done for us?

Our God comforts us today – not with a pat on the back and a, "It's gonna be ok." He encourages with the gospel – the good news of his Son Jesus. He encourages us today with this story. Did you see Jesus in this story?

Elkanah and Hannah went to Shiloh to bring thank offerings to the LORD. But they would see other Israelites bringing quite different sacrifices. One offering was called the sin offering. "When a member of the community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands, he is guilty. When he is aware of his sin, he must bring a lamb, without defect. He is lay his hand on the head of that lamb and slaughter it. The priest will take the blood of that animal and pour it out on the ground. He will burn the animal on the altar. In this way the priest will make atonement for him for the sin he has committed, and he will be forgiven." (Lev 4)

Every time Elkanah and Hannah and now Samuel saw this, they knew that blood must be shed for the forgiveness of sins. Someone must die and take my place on that altar. God used these sacrifices to teach the Israelites. Every year Mary would take her son, Jesus', hand, and they would travel up to Jerusalem for the annual sacrifice and they would know – without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. The lifeless hand she would behold as his body was removed from the cross would remind her of that.

This Son, her son and God's son, was the sacrifice that the LORD had pictured for years with hundreds of thousands of animals. The Lamb was sacrificed for Mary's sins, for the sins of Hannah, sins of Elkanah, and for her son Samuel, for you and for me. God still uses altars to teach. This altar – was designed to teach. This altar symbolizes sacrifice, and it's appropriate that on the top of this altar you

will see a lamb whose hooves are tied, who appears to have been slaughtered. A picture to remind us that blood must be shed for the forgiveness of sins. The blood of a Lamb, without defect... Under the Lamb you will read the words, "It is finished." The sacrifice of this Lamb was complete. The payment for sins was made. No more sacrifice needs to be made for sins.

The sins that confronted us earlier in the sermon – our failure to encourage inactive members, our failure to salt our conversations with grace, our failure to encourage our parents and little ones – those sins, have been covered by the Lamb's blood. He has made atonement – his sacrifice covers over your sins. He now encourages you at this table – he offers you the Lamb's body and blood with bread and wine, to give you the forgiveness of your sins. He encourages you with this baptismal font. Here you were washed with water, you were also washed in the blood of the Lamb. He encourages you here at the ambo, where the Word of God is proclaimed and promises you, "The Lamb took your place."

Here in this place God encourages you with the gospel – the good news of the Lamb of God. Here God tells you how he sees you – through the blood of the Lamb, washed, holy and perfect. Here God encourages you to be who you are in Christ Jesus – and when we are encouraged by God this way, we want to live like Hannah and Mary and Tychicus (from Second Lesson). We want to live that way, God gives us opportunities to live that way.

With the Stewardship calendar... you will pray for brothers and sisters in Christ who are inactive, call them, stop by their home, and write them a letter, and invite them back. And when they do return, I think a hug is in order, and a "We missed, so glad you're here." We will encourage with the gospel. When you serve on boards and committees, express your opinions with tongues that are seasoned with salt, always full of grace, words that are pleasant to the ear. We will express appreciation for work well done, faithfulness in duties. We will encourage with the gospel. When you see children in worship sitting with a single parent, ask them, "Can one of your children sit with me?" When it's a communion Sunday and a parent is flying solo say to them, "Go up to communion, I'll sit with your children." Thank parents for bringing children in to worship. Parents teach your children to stand for the gospel, (and explain why we do!). Have them read along with the lessons, sing the hymns. Give them a piece of paper so they can take notes or draw pictures about the sermon so they're engaged and listening. We will encourage with the gospel.

These are just some of the opportunities! According to the cottage meetings we had last summer, members of this church have indicated that there are many more opportunities with this new building and new location waiting for us to take hold of. Ask God to grant us wisdom to explore new ministries, and enhance the level of service of existing ministries, so that you can encourage with the gospel. Amen.