

**Trinity Church Wall Street 11:15am Holy Eucharist – Trinity Sunday
The Rev. Phillip A. Jackson Transcript**

“God’s Gift Giving Economy”

Today we encounter the story of Hannah, a barren woman who prays to God for a child, promising to dedicate his life to God if God will only grant her this gift. We know now that Hannah’s prayers were answered and that this boy would later become the venerated prophet, Samuel. This story has much to teach us, preaches the Rev. Phillip Jackson, about thanksgiving, reversal, and the mighty power of a humble “nobody” who trusts in God. The readings are 1 Samuel 1:4–20; The Song of Hannah, Hebrews 10:11–14, 19–25; and Mark 13:1–8.

Sermon Transcript:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Please be seated, everyone.

Good morning. Good morning. Good to see you all as always. I saw some of our parishioners today, this morning at the 9:00 o'clock service and here as well, who I've not been with for almost two years during this. If you had told me two years ago that I would experience something like that, I would say, you're crazy. No way. But it's just a sign of what we have all been through, that thing would happen for a parish priest. Today, I want to look at the reading from the 1st book of Samuel. This reading is an important one because it marks the beginning of the shift from tribal Israel. to Kingdom Israel. Tribal, this group of Israelite tribes, are wandering in the desert, that's a loose federation to this kingdom. It marks the emergence of three important figures and there are many figures in this story, but the ark of the narrative centers around three people: Samuel the prophet, who was born in today's reading, and Saul, the first king and then after Saul, who? David, exactly, David. Samuel, Saul, David. This is their saga and it begins most fittingly as we are two weeks or so away from Thanksgiving. It is fitting that that saga would begin with family drama. The text begins, and it says that Elkanah, he had two wives. This was in the days before the Israelites went to monogamy, so he had two wives. His first wife's name is Hannah and there are roots there that go to mean charming and attractive. His second wife Peninnah. Her roots and her name mean fertile and prolific. Hannah, who it says is the one that Elkanah loves.

Hannah his first wife, is bearing. Notice in the text, it says one right after another. It makes sure that we know that the Lord has closed her womb. This is going to be one of the things that we should understand in this first part of the Samuel, Saul, David saga is that the author will be telegraphing themes that will be running throughout the entire 1st and 2nd Samuel. One of those themes is that no matter what seems to be going on down at this level, God is actually working throughout. Hannah is barren. Peninnah is fertile and prolific. She's got all these sons and daughters. Here's the family drama. Peninnah goads her about it all the time. Constantly. You can imagine how happy a household that was. She's just needling the other one constantly. Boom. She's described as, it says, her rival, that is Peninnah, she's the rival. Rival is actually, I understand not a great translation. The better translation would be enemy. Her enemy used to provoke her severely to irritate her because the Lord had closed her womb and, it says, so it went on year by year. You can only imagine what that household was like. It

also tells us that Elkanah would sacrifice at Shiloh. He would go to Shiloh, which was a major sanctuary of the Israeli tribes where the ark of God was lodged. He would go there on a yearly basis with the family and they would make sacrifices and pray and rededicate themselves. But every year they would go and every year Hannah would still be childless and every year her heart would be sad. I love this, in a typical male way trying to console Hannah, the wife that he loves. He says, am I not more to you than 10 sons? He could have said, you're worth more to me than 10 sons, but he makes it about himself, why? Because that's what we do. It says that, "Hannah went after they had eaten and had something to drink. She goes to the sanctuary to present herself to the Lord. Eli is there. Eli is the priest. He's sitting at the sea. He would sit there and watch as Hannah makes this prayer. She says, Oh Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set before you as a Nazarite until the day of his death.

That is, he will neither drink nor shall a razor touch his head. Can anyone remember back in the Book of Judges who the most famous Nazarite was? Samson. Samson, well done. Yes, Samson. He was a bad Nazarite. He didn't work out so well because he drank and then he later cut his hair. That didn't work out well. But Hannah is saying, Lord, if you give me a child, I will dedicate him to your service until the day of his death. She keeps praying and she's praying, not out loud. She's praying, but she's speaking the words and her mouth is moving. Eli sees this and he thinks she's drunk. He of says, woman, get out, put down the wine, go on home. She goes, no, I'm not drunk, but I'm really upset and I'm asking the Lord for this thing. Notice she never tells him what it is she wants. She never tells Eli what she wants. But he just says, go in peace. The God of his real grant the petition you have made to him. He confirms that it is done already, that it is done. Notice, she completely changes. She goes back home, she eats and drinks with her husband. It says, her countenance was sad no longer. Why? Because she has put her full trust in the Lord. She has put her trust in God's hands.

Since they rose early in the morning, they worship, they go back home. They ladadada and then nine months later, she has a son and that son is Samuel. There are elements in his name of 'to ask for' or 'to ask.' Now, the part that is left out of this, unfortunately, although it isn't your bulletin and we just read it is the part that comes immediately after this passage. That's what's called The Song of Hannah, which we just said together. "My heart exalts in you oh, God, my triumph song is lifted in you. My mouth derives my enemies for I rejoice in your salvation." Wait a minute. Does that sound familiar to anyone? It should because Julian and the choir are going to sing it later. When they sing it later, I want you to listen to it because it sounds very suspiciously like the Magnificat. It sounds like the Magnificat. "My soul magnifies the Lord," Mary said, after she had said yes to the angels announcement of her own miraculous birth story, "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit, rejoices in God, my Savior." Listen to what Hannah says, "God destroys and brings to life, cast down and raises up, gives wealth or takes it away, humbles and dignifies. God raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with rulers and inherit a place of honor." Mary said, "He has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly." You remember last year when we were looking at Luke's Gospel, and I talked about the Luke in reversal.

That in Luke's world, the way God works is that that which seems lowest becomes highest, and that which seems highest becomes lowest. That the poor become rich, and the rich become poor. That those who are powerful get the power taken away and that those who have nothing, they have power added to them. It's this reversal in God's world that, which is high becomes low, and that which is lowest and unseen becomes highest. It's just like Hannah's song. It seems fitting in this passage. It seems fitting that what is about to happen in this story, it starts with, nobodys, nowhere with nothing. Because that's the way God likes to work. Not with the mighty, not with the powerful, but with those at the bottom.

Including a young woman in Palestine, a virgin and a nobody. A backward, unheard-of, unthought of person in a backward unthought of unheard of province of the Roman world. From those origins, God is able to do mighty things. Let me leave you with two things I want you to remember. The first is that from small, insignificant people and things, God is able and most willing to do his work. It is from the small places, the small people, the unheard of people, the people that don't count, the people who aren't important, the people who aren't special.

It's from there that God plants his garden and grows. That's number 1. Number 2, is this. Notice that what Hannah did was she asked for a gift from God. A son, she got the son. Then what did she do? She gave it back to God. She gave him back. Somehow in God's economy we are given gifts, and we are to give them back to him. Let me ask you this. What are your gifts? God gave each of us gifts. What are your gifts? Think about that. You all have them. All of us have gifts that God gave us. The question is that this text seems to raise to me, are you giving it back to God? Because somehow in God's gift giving economy, when we accept and receive our gifts and then give them back to God, then they go out to the world and they go out to everyone. They go out and they help grow the Kingdom that he is already planted from small nothing things and people. Does that make sense? It starts with God's activity. Then our acknowledgment of our gifts, and then our gift of our gifts back to God in God's service. Then the growth of that which God has planted. That's how it seems to work. Today, we have the second in our series of communion and community talks. One of our guests today is Krista Tippett who's sitting right over here. We are going to be talking with her amongst other things about the gifts we all possess in our community, and how we might give our gifts back in service, so that those small people and nothing places might bear fruit. We might be in that garden ourselves.

Amen.