

“I have lent my child to the Lord” by Patty Friesen

I Samuel 1:20-28, Luke 18:15-17, Child Dedication Sunday May 12/19

We've heard in our Old Testament reading the powerful story of Hannah. She is a strong woman in 1 Samuel with a name, a voice and a heartbreaking desire for a child. Every year, she would go with her husband to pray for a child. Her husband, God bless him, said, Aren't I worth more to you than ten sons? Apparently not.

Hannah prays with sighs too deep for words, mouthing her prayers silently in the temple and the priest Eli thinks she is drunk. “No, my lord. I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord.” Humbled, Eli responds, “Go in peace; the God of Israel will grant the petition you have made.” When this comes true and Hannah conceives and gives birth, she returns to the temple with her weaned son Samuel to offer him to serve God and the community. The last verse of our reading is dramatic separation: she left him at the temple. We don't want anyone leaving any babies at church this morning. We're glad you bring them but please take them home with you. We the church will do our part in helping pray for them and befriend them and mentor them and teach them God's love in Sunday school but parents, you need to do your part at home as well.

This is what child dedication is all about this morning - this collaborative effort between parents and congregation to 1. give thanks to God for the gift of this child and to 2. commit ourselves to being the best examples of God's love we can be and 3. confess when we're not the best examples of God's love that we can be. Other denominations practice infant baptism which have the same elements of commitment between parents, God and the church but we as Anabaptists believe that children make

their own final commitment to God and Christ when they are older which is symbolized in baptism. We Anabaptists trust our children to God's care and they are safe there with or without baptism, with or without child dedication even. The point about dedication is that it isn't about Norman at all but it is about us as a faith community and this is an opportunity to reflect on how we pass on belief and belonging.

1. We give thanks for our children as loaners from God. Hannah is acutely aware that she was powerless in her ability to produce a child. She knows in the depths of her being that this child is a gift and a miracle and ultimately a loaner from God. She knows the Creator gave her this gift in verse 27: "For this child I prayed and God loaned him to me," and in a huge expression of generosity, she gives the gift back in verse 28, "therefore I have lent him back to God. For as long as Samuel lives, he belongs to God." Wow. We in the 21st century may wonder about the psychological effects of such separation on both Hannah and Samuel but the scripture is devoid of emotion here; simply heralding this courageous act of a mother. Samuel becomes the first prophet in Israel who confronts both religious and political corruption and ordains the first kings of Israel - Saul and David.

2. We commit ourselves to being the best parents and best faith community we can be. As adults we may or may not think we were parented in the ways we think we should have been but one of the graces of growing up is recognizing that as difficult as our parents may have been - they did the best they could. Nowadays we hear of helicopter parents who hover over children's every move. Dr. Brene Brown talks about lawnmower parents who try to mow a path for their children through life - frantically trying to protect them from every bump and bruise. Hannah is the opposite of all that.

She is a loaner parent - releasing a child in love for the greater purposes of God. In this respect - we all may take our parenting less seriously if we had this open stance of release, trust and confidence that our children are strong and capable to handle difficulties. This doesn't mean we don't do our best job of parenting and protecting them - setting boundaries, giving stability and building up the self-esteem of our children. But ultimately they are not our responsibility or our possession. They belong to God. They are on loan to us to mess up as we deem fit.

As a church community we do the best we can in the nursery, in Sunday School, camp and Vacation Bible School, in mentorship of our youth and all the informal ways of interacting but we mess up too which leads us to

3. We confess our shortcomings as parents and as a faith community. If we are humble and honest enough with ourselves, we will recognize that we mess up with our children by blowing up when the situation was as much about our bad mood as their bad behaviour. We don't always walk the talk and children know the difference. How many generations have dismissed faith because the church was inconsistent or judgemental. The problem isn't that we couldn't do better - we're only human after all - the problem is, that we couldn't confess our shortcomings and ask each other and our children for forgiveness. We model conflict transformation at home and then at church and it is a hard lifelong project of being transformed into the strong loving image of Christ.

Now we will hear from the parents of the child being dedicated. They will express their intent for their children, their prayers, their hopes and their need of support

in this endeavour and then we will commit ourselves by the response #791 in the blue
hymnal, #791.