

*Great Women of the Bible – Hannah*  
*1 Samuel 1: 1-28, 2:21*  
*June 17, 2007*

Happy Father's Day to you all! And I want to wish a special Father's Day greeting to Darin Garrison and to Tanya as well as the new parents of Grant Walker Garrison, born this past Monday. One of the highlights of my week was on Tuesday when I got to visit the Garrisons at Woman's Hospital and hold in my arms Grant Walker. To look into those blue eyes looking right back at me and see those little fingers, with almost everyone of those fingers on the left hand stuffed into his little mouth was fascinating. As a father myself it caused me to reflect on the birth of my two children. I thought of the birthday of my older daughter, Katherine, born at 3:03 P.M. on July 23, 1985. I held her in just the same way as I held Grant. I can still taste that cheeseburger at the original Chili's on Park Avenue in Dallas, right down the street from Presbyterian Hospital, my first meal after her birth. Food never tasted so good. My buttons were bursting, as I wanted to tell every person in that restaurant about this child who had just been born. Now that same baby, now a young woman of almost 22 is headed to Houston to spend Father's Day with us later today bringing her new fiancée.

On this Father's Day all kind of images rush into my head from the last few days. On Wednesday we prepared and served our first meal down at SEARCH for 160 homeless clients. Our supervisor for that morning at SEARCH was Queenie. As we were about to leave that day, Queenie asked us to pray for her children. I asked her the name of her children. She said she had six children. I knew I wouldn't remember all their names in the prayer so I asked her what we should be praying about. She said her prayer is that she would be reunited with her children, none of who lived with her. As we

held hands in the SEARCH kitchen and I lifted her up in prayer, I imagined the circumstances that might have separated her from them all. What sadness she must have been feeling. Another image that filled my heart was our Pastor Maggie as she was called into to minister to the family of two children in her school in Sugarland. For you see one afternoon the two young children decided to wade across Oyster Creek and didn't make it. Both of them drowned. Maggie served in the ministry of presence to those wailing parents trying to make sense of their loss.

So as we look at this mother Hannah in our Old Testament story today I bring the same unsettled dissonance to that story as well. I bring, as I introduced last week, that Feminist "hermeneutic of suspicion" to this dusty old text. I ask if it still speaks to parents or if it speaks to the people of Bering Memorial UMC. How can this text speak to Bering people who may not have child-bearing as an option or cannot guarantee that our court system will grant them adoptions? Should we trust an ethic, much more a God, whose only blessing (being cared for by YHWH) is in the form of having (male) children? Is this not an unjust and oppressive God who seems to bless so wantonly those women who have children? Are we cursed with barrenness for all couples whose sexual orientation precludes them from conceiving in the *natural* way? Is the good news, the happy ending for Hannah, have any application to the people of Bering Memorial UMC? How do we find ourselves in this text?

It is in my theological confusion that I discovered the confusion in the translation process itself. For you see the original Greek or Septuagint version of this text and the Hebrew or Masoretic text are badly damaged and confused with each other. Our English translation in our bulletin reads quite differently in what I believe is the pivotal line of

this passage from other English translations. Let me recreate that puzzle for you for it provided for me an answer to the larger issue of this story. At the conclusion of chapter one Hannah, after weaning the baby Samuel, brings a large offering of a bull and bread and wine to the Shiloh Temple. She places this offering on God's altar and then does something extraordinary. After nursing this child that she had prayed about for many years, she leaves her baby to be dedicated to God at the Temple and leaves. Our translation says "they prostrated themselves before God." But the old Greek version says it another way. It says that she lent her son back to God. And it concludes by saying in its own sentence, "She left him there for the Lord." Now if that doesn't give you goose bumps I don't know what will. For here is a woman who was totally powerless in her own family. She suffers with great patience the taunts of her rival who has all the children by her same husband. She suffers a pompous husband who says, "What's wrong dear? Why are you crying? Aren't I worth more than ten sons to you?" PLEASSEE. When Mama ain't happy, nobody is happy. She even suffers the misunderstanding of a clueless, old priest who thinks she's drunk rather than in earnest prayer. Here is a woman who has suffered years of powerlessness. Consider this: a son was not only the symbol of power to a woman; it was power! It was psycho-sexual power that embodied and validated her worth. It was social power in the eyes of the community and the Temple. It was even economic power for if her husband had died and left her a widow, Hannah would have the hope that her son would provide for her. It was the one hope that could give her a legacy to the generation that followed. There were no career options for women. You didn't have to worry about balancing work and family. All weight rested on this one event. So God has now given her power. She has it in her hands and at her

breast. And what does she do? She lends it back to God and leaves her child to be a servant to God. *The message of Hannah is the woman who is powerless gaining power and then giving all of it back to God.* The source of Hannah's joy and peace was her absolute understanding that everything she was and would produce was God's. As she left that young son behind she could say so ironically, "Here God, I lend him to you." It is the perfect message for Father's Day or Mother's Day or any day in our relationship with our Creator.

As I held both of my children my heart filled with the hopes and dreams of their futures. I dreamed of ballet recitals, softball games, camping trips, weddings and grandchildren. I dreamed of rainy days playing silly board games and just hanging out together. But consider the dreams of Hannah for her child. She dreamed that she would finally have this child and that she would give him up so that his life would be totally dedicated to God. She dreamed of him in his vestments serving the people of God. How different are her dreams versus our dreams. How different are God's thoughts from our thoughts. How utterly mysterious and different is this story from the story that we would write. The song that bursts from Hannah's heart in chapter two we call the song of Hannah. It says, "My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in my God; the barren one has born seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. He raises up the poor from the dust. He lifts the needy from the ash heap." Joy in the midst of giving away power? We will see Hannah again in the Samuel story. She comes to visit him in the Temple from time to time and brings him a little robe, a little alb for her boy-priest. God looks upon her in favor in our last lines and she is blessed with six more children. Queenie, Hannah. Two women with many children and of much faith.

This story is really a story about bridges. For you see that Samuel, this boy-priest, will become the human bridge for Israel between a time when twelve disorganized tribes will now be led by an organized monarchy with a line of kings. He will anoint the first two, Saul and David. So Samuel really did belong to God all along. That is the final lesson that we learn from this story. Our children are not our own. Even after their birth, they are on loan back to God. They are God's whether or not their entire vocation is one of serving God. And if our children are on loan back to God, it only follows that our parents lent us out to God as well. So we really are all God's children – no exceptions. You the parents and the childless ones of Bering are entirely God's. Welcome, Grant Walker Garrison. Welcome to God's family here at Bering Memorial UMC. You are on loan now from your parents out to God and out to us. May we never disappoint you or God. May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make her face to shine upon you and bring you peace. Like the Lord brought your mom and dad peace. Like the Lord brought Hannah peace. Amen.