



**DATE:** Oct. 18, 2020 (20th Sun. after Pentecost)  
**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Samuel 1:6-20  
**TITLE:** Hannah cries to God.

We're moving into a new section of sermons for the fall. We're still under the umbrella of "Promises," but now our attention is shifting to the Kings and Prophets. The books of Samuel (they are really one book that was divided because it could not fit on a standard scroll length) is an epic saga that could be the source material of an HBO series that rivals *Game of Thrones* for its intrigue, manipulation, sex, and violence. It contains the rise and fall of Saul, the rise and trials of David, and it all starts with the cries of a desperate woman.

The story begins with Hannah. Like so many Biblical women, she is called "barren." In the ancient world, children provided a sense of security for women. Especially for those women who were much younger than their husbands, children could provide the social safety net that they would need when they became widows. Without children, widows were left dependent on other male relatives of their husband. Without a brother-in-law, they would be left to become beggars or prostitutes.

In addition to this very real fear, Hannah's sadness is compounded by being mocked, dismissed, and misunderstood. Her husband dismisses her grief, telling (basically) "get over it—you have me." She is mocked by other women in her community for being barren. Finally, she goes to the Temple and prays. There, she is confronted by Eli the priest, and told to sober up.

"I'm not drunk," she defends herself. "I'm just pouring out my heart to God." Eli finally hears her grief and gives her some words of assurance.

The story ends with her finding comfort from Eli's words and she conceives and bears a son who she names Samuel. Samuel grows up to replace Eli as the High Priest and prophet. He becomes the King-Maker, anointing first Saul and then David as the King of Israel.

Hannah's story has a happy ending. She is given the relief she requests and her son grows up to be an important figure in the history of Israel.



Many women in Hannah's situation do not get the same reprieve. The word Hannah means literally "favored." If she had not had Samuel (and several children after him) would she still be considered "favored"?

October is Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness month. It is a time to name the grief of being

childless – without shame or guilt or the idea that some women are favored and some are cursed. Let me say this unequivocally—a woman's worth is not determined by her fertility. Secondly, infertility is not a curse of God. Miscarriage, infant loss, and infertility happen. They are a fact of biology, not theology.

Read the story again. Notice that Hannah's grief ended not with the birth of Samuel—but when her grief was truly heard.

As a Church we can help people who struggle with infertility—not by calling it a curse of God and claiming stronger faith will lead to birth. But by hearing the grief, naming it without shame or guilt, and allowing God's favor to land on whoever calls upon God for comfort, not only on those who have given birth.