

Who Is Jesus and What Is a Disciple?

Part 7: Temple, Treasury and Trust

Text: 1 Samuel 1:10-11

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Hannah was one upset woman. She really, really wanted to have a son. But after years of marriage, she was still without a child. To make matters worse, her husband's *other* wife had *lots* of children. And she rarely missed an opportunity to let Hannah know it.

Has anything like that ever happened to you? You really, really want something. But try as you might, it just isn't happening. Worse yet, those around you sometimes taunt you because they already have what you want. It's like when I was a kid and I wanted to play baseball with kids who could play a lot better than I could. And maybe they'd let me play, but I sure got teased every time I dropped the ball or struck out. I just wanted to play the darn game with at least *some* degree of competence. But it wasn't happening. The harder I tried, the more I got teased.

Maybe you have a similar story. You pursue your dreams and you keep hitting a brick wall. You feel powerless, and hopeless.

What do you do when you feel powerless? What do you do when your heart's desire seems unattainable?

You might do what Hannah did. You might pray. Now to some folks that might feel like a pointless exercise. But that's what Hannah did. She and her family had made their annual pilgrimage to the temple at Shiloh. There was prayer and worship and offering of gifts to God and feasting and everyone was having a good time. Everyone except Hannah. One night, after her all-too-extended family had gone to bed, she got down on her knees and begged God for a son. And it wasn't long after that that Hannah became pregnant.

We've been focusing this fall on the question of who is Jesus and what is a disciple. We've gotten away from that question these last few weeks, as we've paused to commemorate first Anniversary Sunday and then Remembrance Sunday. But now, in the context of Hannah and her longing, we need to return to it. Because Jesus was painfully aware that sometimes the desire of the human heart transcends what's possible in the immediate context in which we find ourselves. After all, Jesus prayed for the peace and well being of Jerusalem; and 2,000 years later we're still praying for it (see Matthew 23:37). Jesus prayed for the coming of God's kingdom, and it still hasn't completely arrived (Luke 11:2). Jesus prayed, one Thursday night, that he could somehow avoid the violent death which awaited him the next day; but of course Jesus was executed that Friday (Mark 14:36).

Jesus was aware that you can't always have what your heart desires. But Jesus was *also* aware that with God, *all* things are possible. So he said to his disciples, "Don't be shy about asking God to fulfill the deep longings of your

heart.” Jesus said, “Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and the door shall be opened unto you” (Matthew 7:7).

So Hannah, in her deep desire to have a baby, did exactly what Jesus advised his disciples to do 1,000 years later: she prayed about it. She got down on her knees and begged God to give her a son.

We live our lives in this tension between two powerful realities. On the one hand, we desire many good and wonderful things which will never happen in this imperfect world. On the other hand, many good and wonderful things *do* happen – sometimes seemingly *impossible* things happen – because if God wills it, *all* things are possible. So when you desire something, it’s not a bad idea to ask God for it, because you never know what God has up the divine sleeve. But, the faithful way to end such prayers is with these words: “According to your will, O God.”

I might want someone to donate a house tomorrow that can become home for a few of our Out of the Cold guests. “God, please give us that house,” I might pray. “But only if it’s your will. Give us a house, according to your will, O God.”

When our loved ones are sick, we pray for their healing. And God will *a/ways* deliver on God’s promise to heal. But not always in the way that we wish, or at the time that we wish. What we call death is one of God’s healing mercies, as God ushers a loved one into the fullness of life and health in the world beyond this one. So we pray for healing, “According to your will, O God.”

When a church fears that it is in decline, that its best years are in the past, it may pray for growth, it may pray for new members, it may pray for renewal. But those things don’t always happen in exactly the way that we might hope. So we pray for congregational renewal, “According to your will, O God.”

But the point is this: when we desire something, when our hearts are crying out for something that is good and life-giving, it is wise and faithful to bring that desire to God in prayer. Part of being a disciple of Jesus is bringing our hearts’ desires to God in prayer.

Which is exactly what Hannah did. And it’s interesting that what she got wasn’t immediately what her heart was desiring. What she got at first was peace. Not a baby boy, but peace.

When you offer up to God the longing of your heart, you might not get the specific thing that you’re praying for, but you might get what the human heart at its *deepest* level most *truly* desires: inner peace, and a quiet sense of trust. You might get the peace of God, which passes all understanding (see Philippians 4:7).

Hannah went into the temple to pray. But she didn’t just go into a *building* called a temple. No, in prayer, she went into the temple of her heart. Buildings are important. You can’t carry out ministry – at least not in Canada - without some physical space for programs and fellowship and worship. There might be some warmer climates where you can carry out ministry without owning or renting a building, but not in Canada. So part of being a disciple is giving, and

giving generously, for the care and upkeep of a building. Giving financially, and giving your time and talent. Two of the spiritual gifts that are listed in the Bible are among the talents that are especially needed for the care and upkeep of a building: the gift of administration and the gift of helping hands (see 1 Corinthians 12:28).

It's a blessing to have a well-maintained physical temple in which to worship and serve. But it's even *more* important to enter frequently into the temple of your heart: to go into that sacred space deep within where you will find the peace of God. Even when things are going horribly wrong around you, even when all that you desire seems to be beyond your grasp, the peace of God and the presence of God are to be found when you go into the temple of your heart, and offer up your deepest desires in prayer.

So, in times of distress, go – first of all – into the temple of your heart, and there you will find – secondly – an *abundance* of resources. Deep within the temple of your heart, you will find a treasury of faith, hope and power. It's like the coal mines that have been dug deep in the soil of Nova Scotia and China. If you dig deep enough, you find a great treasure. It's like the oil that is found deep beneath the desert sands of the Middle East or the ocean floor off North America. If you dig deep enough, you find a great treasure. It works the same way with the human heart. Great things become possible when you bring your heart's desire to God in prayer, because prayer taps into the resources which God has placed deep within your heart. Mahatma Gandhi was a small, frail little man. He didn't have much physical power. But he had a great deal of *soul* power. He tapped into that power through prayer. And he changed the world. Mother Theresa seemed to lack even some of Gandhi's soul power. We now know that she had times of profound doubt as she ministered to the homeless and the dying on the streets of Calcutta. But she kept going to that treasury in the temple of her heart anyway. Through prayer, she too found the power to do the seemingly impossible.

And you know what? God has placed that power within you as well. The power to change the world. It may not become apparent in your life time just *how* you've changed the world, but be assured that through the ripple effect of actions which may *seem* insignificant, you have changed it. Praying for that which your heart desires can change the world, partly because such prayer taps into the treasury of power deep within you; in the temple of your heart.

But – finally – you have to trust. You have to trust that God can do great things with the resources that you offer to God: the resources of your heart, and the resources of time and money which you offer to God on a weekly basis. As a kid I took to heart that old notion of "Don't count your chickens before they hatch." *Big mistake!* For some years I was left with the notion that I shouldn't even bother to dream, because things just won't work out for me. I guess what I heard was, "No point in even counting the *eggs*, because they *won't* hatch." We'd better be careful about what we tell our kids; no telling what they might hear.

I've learned a thing or two since then about dreaming dreams and taking risks. You want to know what turned my life around? You want to know what helped me to become more of a dreamer and risk taker? Prayer, yes. Taking a few risks and seeing them come to fruition, to be sure. But also, the movie *Field of Dreams*. It's the story of an Iowa farmer who ploughs under his corn in order to build a baseball diamond. He's convinced that if he builds this ball park, long-dead ball players will show up on his farm and play baseball. "If you build it, they will come." That's what a voice kept saying to him." So he built his baseball diamond. And they came. It worked!

The story is a parable; like Jesus' parables. It's designed not to be taken literally, but to inspire us to action. And here at Knox, we *have* been inspired to act. Eight years ago we began to build a ministry with children and young adults. And have you noticed how many little kids and their parents we have now? Six years ago we built a ministry with the Chinese community. And who among us wasn't moved by the glorious rendition of Blessed Assurance which the choir of the Chinese Fellowship sang on Anniversary Sunday. A year or two after that we started talking about forming a Bell Choir. Well, chalk up another successful dream. I could go on: the Out of the Cold program; our beautiful and adaptable chancel, the progress that we're making on affordable housing.

If you build it, they will come. It's about trust. It's about trusting God to transform the desire of our hearts into the concrete reality of our lives. It's about offering God our financial and spiritual gifts so that our dreams can bear fruit. Offering such gifts to God as a way of saying "Thank you" to God for all that the Spirit has accomplished in our midst. Because, you see, through the power of God and the resources of our inner temple, all things really are possible.

Hannah wanted a baby boy. And she gave birth to a son – the prophet Samuel – who anointed as king a young shepherd named David. A seemingly powerless woman wanted a baby boy. And the world eventually got King David, and the House of David, and through Mary, a descendant of David, the world got Jesus.

Sometimes one small act can change the course of history.

Go into the temple of your heart. Draw upon the treasury of faith and hope and power that you find there. And trust that in the long run, God's will *will* be done. Amen.