

*“... pain and grief are real ...
... but so is hope ...”*

1 Samuel 1:4-20

November 18, 2018

Um um um um
Um um um um
Um um um um um
Um um um um um
Sometimes in our lives
We all have pain
We all have sorrow
But if we are wise
We know that there's always tomorrow
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Grief, pain and sorrow are real. In our humanity, we know these emotions all too well. Now don't get me wrong, we also know the emotions of joy, excitement, and love, and we may try to hold onto these emotions when we are going through times of hardship and doubt, but in reality can we? In the first chapter of 1 Samuel, we hear of the grief, the pain, the sorrow and the frustration of Hannah, as she deals with the fact that she is unable to have a child, or as the scripture puts it, "the Lord had closed her womb" (1 Sam 1:5).

And during all of Hannah's sadness, and pain, her rival provoked her every time she would go to the house of the Lord, and she would weep and not eat because of all of her emotions. Like I stated before, grief and pain and sorrow are real. Although this story is about a woman who is going through these emotions, I think each one of us has probably experienced emotions similar to what Hannah experienced – but more that likely very different reasons.

If you remember last week, I mentioned that my emotions got the best of me, when I was younger, because of my bicycle being 'borrowed'. Others of us have had a small fender bender and our emotions have been shaken, even if no one was physically injured.

Lean on me!
When you're not strong
And I'll be your friend
I'll help you carry on
For it won't be long
'Til I'm gonna need
Somebody to lean on
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In my first year of seminary, Robin and I received a call from my father-in-law. He told Robin that he could not wake Robin's mom. We immediately got into our van and drove down to be with George. In one minute, in one phone call, our morning, our day, our week changed drastically. And ten (10) days later, George didn't answer the phone when we called. We drove down to see to find out why George hadn't answered. That morning our week was drastically changed again – from that day, Robin referred to herself as an orphan. During those two and a half (2 ½) weeks I didn't think too much about me, I thought about the pain and grief that she was experiencing.

Robin suffered the loss of her parents. Hannah also suffered from the loss of her dream – the dream of becoming pregnant, bearing a child, becoming a mother. Her deep anguish kept her from eating. What is more, her barrenness led to being ostracized within her own family.

Even though her husband still cherished her, Elkanah's other wife taunted her, rejecting Hannah because of her inability to have children.

So Hannah went to the temple and prayed to the Lord for the Lord to bless her with a child. And in her praying, in her pleading with God, the priest, Eli, saw her and thought she was not quite all there, maybe even drunk, and preferred that she not be there. When he learned of her purpose for being at the temple, his attitude changed and as she left, he blessed her, saying: "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him" (1 Sam 1:17).

Hannah lifted up her pain, her grief, her anxiety, and her frustration to the Lord, and the Lord spoke to her through Eli, the priest, and blessed her with what she had asked for and wanted this whole time. In our own offerings to God, in our own prayers to the Lord, we don't often see results like Hannah's; we don't always get what we are praying for. But even in our pain, our grief, our sorrow and our doubt – that doesn't give us a reason to give up. I understand that it is really easy to give up on prayer and on hope during these hardships, but I encourage each of you, each of us to continue on in hope.

In our time of grief and pain, it is hard to hold on to hope. It is hard to see the silver lining, the beauty of the rain, and the light in our darkness. But for each of us, we can cling to the hope found in our baptism and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In our baptism, each of us is claimed as a child of God, loved, forgiven, and lifted up as a brother or sister of Christ. And in that claim, we are filled with the Holy Spirit and promised life after death through Christ. It is through this promise that we cling to hope, that no matter what hardships we endure in this life, the God of Israel, the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit will be enduring with us, with you, and with Hannah.

Through our baptisms we are remembered by the Lord, called by name, and listened to by God. In our reality, our prayers to help us out of our grief and pain may not always be realized, but that doesn't mean we should stop praying and hoping for change.

It was 17 months ago today, that Robin died – and through all the prayers and pleading with God to not take her from this world, those prayers could never have been answered, because I found out she was already in the arms of God. But that didn't stop me from praying and thinking those things. My hope for Robin changed on that day and in the days following, from hoping that she would live a long and healthy life, because now I know that she is remembered and was loved, and because the family knew how strong she was – I now have come to the realization to know the wonderful and amazing things God can do through us and in us.

For Hannah, she was able to keep at it, and her prayers were answered. She had a son, and her hope for the future was realized in that moment. Our grief, our pain, and our sorrow may never fully go away in this life, but in the promise of Immanuel, God with us, we can live into our emotions, and know that God is listening, loving, and guiding us, every day of our lives. Amen.