

Reigniting Our Hope: The Story of Hannah Deacon Larry Oney

Hello friends, I'm Deacon Larry Oney with Hope and Purpose Ministries here in New Orleans, Louisiana. I'm so glad to have the opportunity to share this retreat reflection with you today, from the first book of Samuel during this Advent season. We've all had an extraordinary year so far with racial unrest, political wrangling, and all of the implications of dealing with the coronavirus, which we all know too well. If you're watching and participating in this advent retreat, that means that you're reaching for something more in this season. And God is pleased with your efforts and our efforts to carve out some time and space to intentionally draw near to him during this time. Some of us, as some of you may be participating because you may have come to a point that you just want to take a break for a few minutes and reflect and look forward toward the season in a hopeful and unintentional way.

I love the advent season personally, because it really is at the heart of our ministry, which is called Hope and Purpose. So, we really do believe that God wants all of us to live in hope and to walk with purpose on the earth. Particularly at this moment in the world as a sign of our faith and His salvific love for us. This Advent season gives us the opportunity to reignite hope in our hearts no matter what our circumstances might be, no matter how bleak the situation looks, no matter how long the struggle has been, no matter how many bumps and bruises and hurts we've had to endure to this point. For many, this Advent season comes at the end of what seemed like a very long, cold and hard winter, but I have good news for you today. With God, there's always hope and hope in Him does not disappoint.

In first Samuel today, we see a woman named Hannah with her own hard situation. She's barren, she cannot have any children and she deeply desires a child because in old Testament times a barren woman was thought to be a failure, which we know is not that way. That's really not the way that God looks at it, but that's what their thoughts about it. Because of her barrenness Hannah is ridiculed to the point of weeping and crying out. In our lives too, each of us sometimes face a situation in times that we can't give birth to anything new, it seems as a barrenness there's a dryness in us.

We sometimes find it hard to give birth to a new job, a new opportunity, a new relationship, or a new beginning. To break free from addiction, to grab a hold of a new birth from our sadness, from worry and anxiety, praying and crying out for God to work in us can open a way for a new season of hope for us. Hannah shows the way, Hannah did what the Lord asks all of us to do. She presented herself to the Lord in her open bitterness and sadness and made a request known to the Lord. In other words, she brought herself to the Lord just the way she was, in the word she cried out.

Some people think that it's inappropriate to approach the Lord in that way. Not at all. On the contrary, God wants us to be real with Him when we come into His presence. He doesn't want us to come before Him with any mask on. Hannah obviously knows how to approach God, because she approaches Him by saying, "O Lord of hosts." In other words, she calls the Lord by His name. Basically, she's giving God praise by calling Him by that name. She is acknowledging that

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God has all power and authority and He's ruler over the universe. God really loves it when we approach Him in this manner, He doesn't demand praise from us, but He desires it, and His heart is moved when we approach Him with praise. So, what did Hannah say to the Lord of hosts after acknowledging Him? She says, "Lord, if you remember me and don't forget me and if you give your handmaid a male child, I will give him to the Lord for as long as he lives." What a powerful statement by Hannah. She's just said that she would give the Lord back what the Lord has given to her. To have a capacity to give like this requires a deep appreciation of who God is in our lives.

The reality is that God has given us everything, even our very breath. So, when we lift up our voices to praise God, we're giving back to God what He's given to us. For God has given His Ruach HaKodesh, which means breath of God. That is the breath of God is in us, without God's breath we're unable to live, to move and have any being at all. Hannah understood that God was doing a great thing in her life and out of the moving into the power of God in our heart, she decided that she would give back to God what God gave to her. Which is what every mother that freely gives her son to be a priest of the most high God does.

So, Hannah dedicated the boy to the Lord. It should be the same with us once we understand that it's God who has given us everything so we can respond to Him by returning it to His heart. God has given us the breadth to sing praises to Him. He's given us resources so that we might have food to eat and shelter over our heads, and so we return part of what He's given to us. We give it back to Him with our offerings to the church and arms giving to the poor. It's a beautiful exchange once we understand the source of all that we have.

Hannah shows us the way during this Advent season in a powerful way, because she's received from God, what she has with a right posture of our heart and therefore she's able to return it. She's not diminished in any way in returning back to the Lord, what He's given her. In fact, she's built up in the spiritual realm even more because she's given up something precious unto the Lord, unto the heart of God rather. And that way she receives even more from the Lord.

During this Advent season, many people are struggling with many things. You and I have the opportunity to give in some ways that sometimes in our business, we might overlook the capacity that we have. For example, many of us have clothes in our closet. I know I do that the poor need. Right now, some of us have the ability to go in our closet and get out those sizes that are too small for us, in my case, for a little extra weight that I put on during the lock down and bring them to the poor. As I was meditating on this reflection, I was thinking that it would be a good opportunity for us to visualize in our own minds that, whatever we take and intentionally bring to the poor, we're like bringing it to the Christ child who's coming into the world, because we are. Because Jesus says, whatever you do for the least of my people you do unto me. That makes it real for us during this Advent.

There might be someone that we might know that they might have a financial need or even need food to sustain themselves. For you and I had to take a little pilgrimage in a safe way to bring it to them would be like given unto the heart of God in an intimate and personal way during this advent season. Hannah's giving is a foreshadowing of the attitude in which Mary, the mother of God gave. After giving her son Samuel to the Lord, Hannah praises God saying, my heart exults

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in the Lord. My horn is exalted in my Lord, there is no one like the Lord, there's no rock like our God. And we hear Mary saying something similar after the Lord touched her and when she went to visit her cousin, Elizabeth. Mary, the mother of God said something similar that Hannah said after the Holy spirit overshadowed her and filled her womb with a child, Jesus. And she went to share the news with her cousin Elizabeth, and to help Elizabeth who was much older than her.

Mary praise God saying, "my soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. For He has looked upon His lowly handmaid behold from now on all ages will call me, blessed." The Mighty one has done great things for me and Holy is His name. This expression of praise is a beautiful thing after God has worked in Mary's heart and even in her womb, Hannah's disposition in her circumstances was key to her spiritual movement forward.

Hannah did three things for her spiritual advancement. One, she made an honest prayer to God. And secondly, she left her requests before the Lord and trust. So, we go before the blessed sacrament with something that we need the Lord to work on in our life, we just need to leave it there for Him. And finally, Hannah received the encouragement from Eli, the man of God who was in the temple.

So perhaps they're in this moment in advent, as we're preparing for the coming of the Lord, we can reflect on what we've been given by the Lord. And maybe we can look at what we've been holding back from the Lord. So, we could perhaps ask ourselves, has God given us an excess of resources that we could share with some others? Perhaps there are people that have heard us over the last few months. Maybe we can consider giving away the resentments that we're holding, the anger that we've experienced, the real disappointments that we've encountered so that we could have a new season going forward and hope during this advent.

The scripture is clear that when we give it says that it will be given unto us, good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over. I love what the good news translation says about giving. It says this, the measure that we use for others is the one that God will use for us. So, if we want to receive God's extravagant mercy, we have to give extravagant mercy to those who have hurt us. This might be a good time during this Advent season to let go of any anger from a loss of a job, a loss of a friend, anger about health, any adverse financial situation. We could just give it all away to the Lord. You could even raise your hands as an open prophetic gesture of letting go of those things, just give them up to the Lord. I like to say those things out loud and to verbalize Him saying, "Lord, I'm breathing out unforgiveness, Lord, I'm breathing out anger, Lord, I'm breathing out worry about financial situations. Lord, I'm breathing in your goodness, I'm breathing in your truth, Lord, I'm breathing in your beauty into the depths of my soul."

This advent season is an opportunity for us to be generous and self-giving like, Hannah, I encourage you to don't hold back, don't be afraid that you won't have enough. And if we are in need, if you're in need to follow the example of Hannah, make an honest prayer to God, leave the request before the Lord and trust. I pray that you'll be encouraged like Hannah was with this message today.

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For the scripture says that God will supply all of our needs according to his riches and glory by Christ Jesus. And St. Paul reminds us that no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in during this advent season, he says this, "Rejoice in the Lord always, I say it again rejoice." Paul goes on to say that your kindness should be known to all, the Lord is near have no anxiety at all, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, make your request known to God. And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

That's exactly what Hannah did, and that's what we are encouraged to do today. That whatever our circumstances are, whatever your circumstances is, give thanks to the Lord, trusting that He sees you, He knows you, He cares for you and that He loves you. So, my prayer for you and for me today is that you would have no anxiety at all, and that you would live in hope and walk in purpose during this Advent season. God bless you.