

## **Dare to Imagine God's Love for Us**

### **Advent Week 5**

#### **1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26 and Colossians 3:12-17**

Good Morning Church Family and to those of who are watching with us online today.

Our Emmanuel, our God with Us has come. Love has come down to be with us. Jesus, the Christ Child has been born, unto us a son is given. Praise God! I hope you all had a lovely Christmas yesterday filled with hope, peace, joy and love.

For me, one of the great joys of being a parent is making holidays feel special, feel joyful and even a bit magical. Watching the looks on the kids faces when they open their presents, wiping the cinnamon bun crumbs from their lips, laughing and chasing their cousins around the house makes me feel so tender towards them. It makes me want the best things for them. Christmases, Thanksgiving and Birthdays always bring up these feelings in me. Perhaps some of you remember feeling that way with your own kids, or nieces and nephews, or grandchildren. There is a certain tenderness towards an adult and a child. Marg thoughtfully gave our kids Christmas gifts, and when they asked me who the packages were from I said, "Auntie Marg." Junia asked, "How is Marg our Auntie?" "We'll she's not related to us, but she's an Auntie in our lives." "She's our Auntie because we love her?" "Exactly", I said, "Love makes people family." One of the great gifts to us of being part of this church is that our kids have so many bonus aunts and uncles. Adults who take an interest in them and care about them.

In our text for this morning, we see this lovely image of the tender love between a parent and child in the book of 1 Samuel. Last week, we talked about Hannah's story and her song of praise, her magnificat to God. That magnificat is where we left off with Hannah last week, but we're going to pick up her story again now. Hannah bore a son, and named him Samuel. True to her word, Hannah gave her son back to God as a servant at the Temple. We're told that Samuel went there when "was weaned." Most biblical scholars put Samuel's age to between three and five years old. So, a really little boy. It'd be like Ezra starting life in service to God. We read this account from 1 Samuel starting in verse 21 of chapter 1, "When she had weaned him, She brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh; and the child was young. Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. And she said, "Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord has granted me the petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is given to the Lord. She left him there for the Lord."

Hannah's faith in God and God's people was so great that she left her small child to serve God. She believed so deeply in the tender, faithful love of God that essentially says to God, "you raise him. I know you'll take care of him." But, it's not as though Hannah drops Samuel off at the temple and then forgets about him. Not at all. In the middle of chapter two of the 1 Samuel there is a tear jerker account of Hannah's tender, compassionate love for her son.

Each year, Elkanah's, Hannah's Husband, household makes a trip to the temple to offer their annual sacrifices in keeping with Jewish law. And every year, Hannah would make a new linen ephod for Samuel. A ephod was one of the garments that the Jewish priests would wear. Imagine it as sort of a long apron, with a front and back, or almost like an artist's smock. Each year, before the trip to the temple, Hannah would make this. She'd imagine how much Samuel would have grown, perhaps she'd find another little child around the same age to try it, to help her get the fit just right. Samuel wore a garment sewn with such care, a garment made from his mother's love. When I read this text, the verses that came to my mind were Isaiah 49:15 and 16, "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may be forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands."

In the story of Hannah and Samuel and in the words of the Prophet Isaiah we see this parallel of the love of a parent mirrored with the love of God. Hannah could not forget Samuel. This is evidenced by the way she remembered him, created a gift for him when she would see him each year, she clothed him in her love. So too God cannot forget us. God remembers us, tells us we are inscribed on the palms of God's hand. We are wrapped in God's hands, clothed in God's love. Friends, on this day after Christ, remember that God clothes us with his love, with the tenderness of a parent.

One of my favourite humans in this world is my younger Sister, Cierra. Like many sisters, we fought like cats and dogs when we were younger. But as an adult, I

appreciate her so much. She's funny, vivacious, wise and confident. Usually when we're together, she makes me laugh so hard that tears run down my face. I have a hooded sweatshirt, a bunnyhug, that my sister gave me in high school for my birthday. It's faded, doesn't fit the best, and the sleeves are always falling in the sink when I wash dishes, but I pull it out and put it on when I miss her. When I want to feel that closeness to her, even though we live 18 hours apart.

Do you own something like this? A garment, a blanket, or some kind of item that reminds you of a tender love in your life? Hold onto that image, or item or feeling as we move into our next section of scripture. Interestingly, this passage also uses garment imagery. "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ[b] dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

There's two big ideas that I'd like us to pay attention to in this passage this morning, the first is how this passage reveals what God's character is like. Let's meditate together on

that for a bit. The first idea we see is that we are God's chosen ones. God selected us, God wants us. We have been made Holy by God and we are loved by God. Like a good parent, it is in the nature of God to love, to choose us as family over and over and over. This gentle parent nature cannot be overemphasized. God is forgiving. "As far as the east is from the west, so far have I removed your transgressions." The Peace of Christ and the Word of Christ are true and trustworthy. Compasses that point us to the Heart of God for us and for this world.

Earlier on in my own faith journey, these sort of lists of how to act and behave as a follower of Christ made me feel pressured. It sounded like such lofty aspiration, it sounded like things that I had to get right if I wanted to be good, if I wanted to live like a real Christian. What I missed in these passages was God's tender parental heart. How God was lovingly crafting a garment for his holy, beloved children just as Hannah did her for her beloved child. This is evidenced in two ways in this text.

The first way is that we see that God does not ask us to do anything or be anything in this world that he has not already done or been in the person of Jesus Christ. God is not a "do as I say, not as I do" sort of parent. No, God showed us through the ministry of Jesus how to live like this in the world. Christ clothed himself with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit we can do the same in our lives. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in

Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth," that's Act 1:8. God showed us how to live as his people in this world and then gave us the means by which to do it.

As a parent or grandparent, have you ever had a moment when you heard something come out of your child's mouth and thought, "oh, oh no. That's something I say. And that sounds very unflattering hearing it come out of the mouth of the seven year old." Isn't that such a moment of conviction? Like when Junia scolded Ezra who was looking for something, "It's literally right there!" Don't those moments always seem to happen when others are watching? But in the same way, doesn't it fill you up to hear a child repeat something you've longed for them to learn from you? "You don't have to be afraid, cuz God is with us." So much for parenting isn't about what is taught, but about what is caught. God longs for his children to catch his love for them, to catch his grand redemptive plan for this world and all who dwell in it.

The second way that we see God's tender parent heart is that God wants the best for us. What parent doesn't want the best for their child? What parent doesn't long for their child to live well with themselves and with others? When we look at our passage in Colossians through the eyes of tender parent, I can see that longing for us, God's beloved children reflected. Putting on the clothing of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience and especially love is the best way to make our way through this life; for God's glory and our own flourishing. Further God is gracious, and growing in the

character traits, the wardrobe, if you will, that are outlined in Colossians is a lifelong journey. Like Hannah, God helps us to take off the things that no longer fit us- the greed, envy, rage, unkindness or hate, and helps us put on the things which fit us now, the things that we need to grow into. A parent would never scold a child, "Why doesn't this fit you yet!? You should be this size by now!" Instead, parents find what their children need, sort out what no longer fits, and find things with just enough room to grow.

Friends, on this morning when we remember God coming to us Jesus Christ, let us attune our ears and our hearts to the tender parental heart of God. May we experience God's care, God's longing for our flourishing, and the graciousness with which God helps us grow in the character of Christ. May God's love be the garment we wrap ourselves in and the one that we offer to one another, to both friend and enemy, neighbour and stranger. Amen.