

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost – November 26, 2017
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

1 Samuel 1:1-28

FOR REFLECTION

“Piglet noticed that even though he had a Very Small Heart, it could hold a rather large amount of Gratitude.”

- A.A. Milne, Winnie-the-Pooh

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See this video on Gratitude!!

<http://www.charlottestories.com/local-charlotte-church-released-christmas-video-thats-going-viral-4-million-views/>

Gratitude: Hannah

Al Anon is the 12-step program for co-dependent people. To qualify for the program all you need is one alcoholic or drug-addict in your life. I had more than one, so you could say I was over-qualified.

The premise of the program is much like cognitive therapy: what you think affects your mood and behavior and responses to situations. So, the program offers a different way of thinking about things – which then changes one’s mood and behavior. By repeating the 12-steps, concepts and traditions at every meeting – it forms a framework for thinking differently. It’s like brainwashing in the sense of clearing out ingrained bad habits from childhood and beyond. It un-traps you – frees you to be a different person.

I’ve recently returned to program for a tune-up and have been reminded of some important basic thought skills. One is the phrase, “That’s about them, not about me.” If someone has a negative response to something I say or do, their response is about them. I don’t need to take responsibility for “fixing” them. I DO need to take responsibility for what I say or do – and trust myself when I feel that I’ve done the best I can do in the situation.

Another thought skill is **gratitude**. I remember my first weeks in program when I, rather suddenly, felt grateful – for the first time in years. It was such an overwhelming feeling, I began to write thank you letters to people in my life – and to public figures I admired. I remember that Hillary Clinton was First Lady at the time and she was doing work with women and children internationally. She got a letter of gratitude.

This practice of gratitude, intermittent though it has been, has graced my life now for decades. I currently have a friend who, multiple times a week, sends me lists of 10 things she is grateful for. And every week or two I find a way to respond with my 10 things – which changes that day for the positive every time. I am grateful for her.

It turns out that Al Anon's focus on gratitude is based on neuroscience. Here are some notes from an article entitled: **The Neuroscience of Why Gratitude Makes Us Healthier** --by Ocean Robbins, CEO of the Food Revolution Network:

Negative attitudes are bad for you. And gratitude, it turns out, makes you happier and healthier. If you invest in a way of seeing the world that is mean and frustrated, you're going to get a world that is, well, more mean and frustrating. But if you can find any authentic reason to give thanks, anything that is going right with the world or your life, and put your attention there, then statistics say you're going to be better off...

Recent studies have concluded that the expression of gratitude can have profound and positive effects on our health, our moods and even the survival of our marriages. As Drs. Blaire and Rita Justice reported for the University of Texas Health Science Center, "a growing body of research shows that gratitude is truly amazing in its physical and psychosocial benefits."

Researchers had people keep gratitude journals. Those who did were 25% happier than other control groups and reported fewer health complaints, and exercised an average of 1.5 hours more.

...Participants in the gratitude group also reported offering others more emotional support or help with a personal problem, indicating that the gratitude exercise **increased their goodwill towards others**, or more technically, their "pro-social" motivation.

...they reported **more hours of sleep each night**, and feeling more refreshed upon awakening. The gratitude group also reported **more satisfaction with their lives as a whole**, felt more optimism about the upcoming week, and felt considerably more connected with others than did participants in the control group.

...Several studies have shown depression to be inversely correlated to gratitude. It seems that **the more grateful a person is, the less depressed they are.**

Several decades of research on **marriages** concluded that that:

...unless a couple is able to maintain a high ratio of positive to negative encounters (5:1 or greater), it is likely the marriage will end.

So affirming one's partner multiple times a day is essential to relational health.

Some suggestions for all of us:

1) Keep a daily journal of three [or ten] things you are thankful for. This works well first thing in the morning, or just before you go to bed.

2) Make it a practice to tell a spouse, partner or friend something you appreciate about them every day.

3) Look in the mirror when you are brushing your teeth, and think about something you have done well recently or something you like about yourself.

Ocean Robbins is a father, author, speaker, facilitator, and the CEO of the Food Revolution Network.
<http://www.dailygood.org/story/578/the-neuroscience-of-why-gratitude-makes-us-healthier-ocean-robbins/>

I was practicing gratitude and making lists when I met my husband – and also when we found our son Peter. The levels of gratitude rose exponentially – something I try to remember on days when gratitude is difficult.

Before John and Peter came into my life, I related very heavily to Hannah – with whom I share a name. [Anne is a derivative name of Hannah.] I have always longed to have children; I wasn't able to physically have children. And as much as I celebrated the births of four nieces and the children of friends – friends in their 30's and 40's even – my heart was broken in any number of ways. And I had some serious words with my Maker about my situation – none of them words of gratitude.

The arrival of Peter when I was 51 went a long way to repair my relationship with the Deity. I am not as gracious as Hannah – as I have not dedicated Peter to the priesthood. But I am mollified by this gift of a most unusual and amazing kid – and grateful for the things I am learning by being responsible for his well-being, his emotional and intellectual cultivation.

Some of you may have watched the video I sent out in the enews this week.

<http://www.charlottestories.com/local-charlotte-church-released-christmas-video-thats-going-viral-4-million-views/>

The point is well-taken: consider everything we have and everyone we love as a gift. If we focus on what we have – rather than what we don't have and want – every day becomes a Christmas morning. It was hard for Hannah to do that with Peninnah rubbing her face in her infertility. But Hannah's husband was trying to help her change her perspective by showing her extra love and treating her like a favorite – good work on the affirmations, Elkanah!

My sister, a person for whom I have been grateful all our lives, recommended a great movie that illustrates the power of gratitude for life. "Maudie" is based on the true story of Maud Lewis a "Canadian painter whose work was so exuberant, you'd never guess at the difficult life she lived...[poor and] crippled by juvenile rheumatoid arthritis."

With her lot in life, she could have been a bitter, miserable person. But, for her, all it took for inspiration was a window to look out at the world. She paints the world as she sees it – colorful and joyful. One line that stays with you is said while she gazes out the window: "The whole of life...already framed."

<https://www.npr.org/2017/06/19/532916596/maudie-made-such-joyful-art-you-d-never-guess-how-tough-she-had-it>

My mom, as you know, has Alzheimer's and no longer knows who we are. For over a year she has been lethargic and barely conscious when we visit – leaving me in full-blown grief over what has been lost. A few months ago, one of the drugs mom was taking was discontinued. On Friday Jean and I had a great visit with her – she was lively, talkative and really funny. It was like a piece of her personality was back – even though she still had no clue who we were. At one point she said, “You people are funny. No one in my family is funny.” Our visit was one more reminder to be grateful for what we have rather than what we've lost. Mom is still alive and available to love and laugh with. That is a gift.

All of this is to say that the One Who Made Us installed in our bodies a neurology that thrives on gratitude and affirmation.

And in a time and culture that is based on selling us things we don't have and must want –

in an atmosphere of competition and division –

in a world that has gone off it's rocker with revenge, narcissism, greed and violence –

G-d nudges us toward the positive:

Look at what I've given you!

See what you have!

Isn't it beautiful?!

1 Samuel 1:1-28

1 There was a certain man of Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham son of Elihu son of Tohu son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. 2 He had two wives; the name of one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

3 Now this man used to go up year by year from his town to worship and to sacrifice to the Lord of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the Lord. 4 On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; 5 but to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the Lord had closed her womb. 6 Her rival used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb. 7 So it went on year after year; as often as she went up to the house of the Lord, she used to provoke her. Therefore, Hannah wept and would not eat. 8 Her husband Elkanah said to her, 'Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?'

9 After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the Lord. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. 10 She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord, and wept bitterly. 11 She made this vow: 'O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head.'

12 As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. 13 Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore, Eli thought she was drunk. 14 So Eli said to her, 'How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine.' 15 But Hannah answered, 'No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. 16 Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time.' 17 Then Eli answered, 'Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him.' 18 And she said, 'Let your servant find favour in your sight.' Then the woman went to her quarters, ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer.

19 They rose early in the morning and worshipped before the Lord; then they went back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her. 20 In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, 'I have asked him of the Lord.'

21 The man Elkanah and all his household went up to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice, and to pay his vow. 22 But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, 'As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, that he may appear in the presence of the Lord, and remain there forever; I will offer him as a nazirite for all time.' 23 Her husband Elkanah said to her, 'Do what seems best to you, wait until you have weaned him; only—may the Lord establish his word.' So the woman remained and nursed her son, until she weaned him. 24 When she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine. She brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh; and the child was young. 25 Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. 26 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. 27 For this child I prayed; and the Lord has granted me the petition that I made to him. 28 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.

Handout

1 Samuel begins with a **Levitical genealogy** – Samuel is listed as a member of the clan of Kohath [Cohen] which had special responsibility for the ark [of the covenant].

Rami Nir; "Israel" 2007. © **The Dynasty of Kohath**

Kohath's mother may have been a daughter of Pharaoh (since Kohath was the father of the Dynasty). **The eternal Dynasty of the "High Cohen"**, the descendants of Kohath, was chosen to serve the "God of Israel", constantly watching, Day and Night, the ceremonies in honor of the "Ark and the Covenant Tablets", which were placed in the "Holy of Holies" of the "Meeting Tent" and later on, of "Temple I". A most primary duty of the "High Cohen" was a daily documentation in the diary of the "Ark and the Covenant Tablets" -- called the "Book of Jashar" = ("Joshua" 10- -13) = the "Book of the God of Israel". Above all, only a "High Cohen" or his direct children could handle the "Ark and the Covenant Tablets". It was no doubt remembered that no stranger was allowed to visit the inside of the "Meeting Tent" or of the Temple, and especially to touch the sacred "Ark and the Covenant Tablets".

http://tora.us.fm/tnk1/sofrim/raminir/the_dynasty_of_kohath.pdf

Shiloh: ancient city/shrine in Samaria (West Bank) * 20 miles north of Jerusalem

Nazirite: separated or consecrated * one dedicated to the service of G-d by vows of separation and abstention from wine and cutting the hair [*remember Samson*]

Hannah: 'G-d has favoured me' * favor, grace

Why did Hannah pray silently? Because she was making a vow to God. At that time a husband could rescind any vow his wife made if he did so within a day of the vow being made. Hannah, desperate, did not want this to happen, so she mouthed the words without actually speaking them aloud.

What was this vow to which Elkanah might have objected? That if God gave her a son, she would give this son back to God by dedicated him as a Nazirite, a holy man sworn to serve God all his life. 'He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head.' Verse 11.

If Elkanah had heard this vow, he would surely have objected. The boy after all would be his son as well as hers. So, she mouthed the words silently. **(It is worth noting that at that time a clever deception was admired.)**

<http://www.womeninthebible.net/women-bible-old-new-testaments/hannah/>

Penin'nah: 'a precious stone', something like coral or pearl – in other words, beautiful but hard and cold. The Hebrew word became technical term for second wife or co-wife in the rabbinic period.

Elkanah: 'bought/owned by G-d' * G-d has Created * G-d has possessed

Eli: High * ascended * 'my G-d'

Samuel: 'G-d heard' (Hannah's prayer) * **shemu'el** – I have asked him of the Lord OR **sheme'el** – He who is from G-d * Name of G-d or G-d has heard

Sources

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Harper Collins Study Bible

Peninnah – Hebrew word became technical term for second wife or co-wife in the rabbinic period

Nazirite – separated or consecrated, one dedicated to the service of the Lord by vows of separation and abstention from wine and cutting the hair

Levitical genealogy – listed as a member of the clan of Kohath [Cohen!] which had special responsibility for the ark [of the covenant]

Harper Collins Study Bible

Rami Nir; "Israel" 2007. ©

The Dynasty of Kohath

Kohath's mother may have been a daughter of Pharaoh (since Kohath was the father of the Dynasty). The eternal Dynasty of the "High Cohen", the descendants of Kohath, was chosen to serve the "God of Israel", constantly watching, Day and Night, the ceremonies in honor of the "Ark and the Covenant Tablets", which were placed in the "Holy of Holies" of the "Meeting Tent" and later on, of "Temple I". A most primary duty of the "High Cohen" was a daily documentation in the diary of the "Ark and the Covenant Tablets" -- called the "Book of Jashar" = ("Joshua" 10- -13) = the "Book of the God of Israel". Above all, only a "High Cohen" or his direct children could handle the "Ark and the Covenant Tablets". It was no doubt remembered that no stranger was allowed to visit the inside of the "Meeting Tent" or of the Temple, and especially to touch the sacred "Ark and the Covenant Tablets".

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Hannah: a persistent woman

Hannah means 'G-d has favoured me' (with a child) * [favor, grace]

Penin'nah means 'a precious stone', something like coral or pearl – in other words, beautiful but hard and cold

Elkanah means 'bought/owned by God'

Samuel means 'G-d heard' (Hannah's prayer) [*shemu'el – I have asked him of the Lord / sheme'el – He who is from G-d*] * Name of God or God has heard

Main themes of the story

Don't give up hope. God is listening. Remember that there is purpose in everything God does, even if we don't see what it is.

Kindness or malice? It's our choice. The main story is about the special nature of Samuel's birth, but it's also about the way women can be cruel to one another. Hannah has no child. She desperately wants one. Penin'nah has many children. Does she sympathise with Hannah and pity her pain? No. She enjoys rubbing salt into Hannah's wounded heart.

The story of Hannah has three episodes:

She is childless and unhappy (1 Samuel 1-8) Bible text below Unhappy because she has no children and plagued by Peninn'nah, her husband's other wife, Hannah waits for God to hear the prayer of a barren woman.

Hannah's vow (1 Samuel 9-19) Bible text below On a visit to God's shrine at Shiloh Hannah promises that, if God gives her a son, she will dedicate him as a Nazirite, a holy man of God. Watching her anguished prayer, Eli the priest at the shrine thinks she is drunk, but she convinces him she is sincere. He prays for her, that God will grant her wish.

New-born baby Hannah fulfils her vow. (1 Samuel 19-28, 2:1-10, 18-21) Bible text below Hannah has a son, Samuel. Even though it must have caused her immeasurable pain, she honours her promise to God and takes her little son to be raised by the priests at Shiloh. She visits him every year, taking a linen garment called an 'ephod' which marks her son as having priestly status.

Hannah is childless and unhappy

1 Samuel 1-8

Hannah was a young woman married to a man called Elkanah. He loved her tenderly and she loved him. But he had another wife, Penin'nah, not loved so much but remarkably fertile (this story is set between the lawless period of the Judges and the more settled time of King David; it was still common for a man to have several wives, as it had been in the time of the Genesis stories). While Hannah had never had a child, Penin'nah was surrounded by both sons and daughters.

Penin'nah saw her numerous children as her glory, and indeed they were. She thought they should have made her the apple of her husband's eye. They did not. Elkanah was deeply in love with the barren wife Hannah, instead of the fertile Penin'nah.

One can sympathise with her pain. But jealousy can make a woman cruel, and Penin'nah was no exception. She tormented Hannah about her lack of children. The Bible text says she provoked Hannah severely, irritating her constantly by mocking Hannah's lack of children. This went on for years, especially at those time that Hannah prayed for children at the holy shrine at Shiloh, about twenty miles north of Jerusalem.

One year when these three people were at Shiloh, Elkanah tried clumsily to comfort Hannah: 'aren't I more to you than ten sons?' he asked. Hannah's response is not recorded. But once again she presented herself at the shrine and began her prayer.

The shrine/temple had seats beside the door, and on one of these sat Eli, the shrine's priest. When Hannah began to pray he saw her deep distress, but she prayed silently so that he did not hear her prayer.

The vow at Shiloh

1 Samuel 9-19

Why did she pray silently? Because she was making a vow to God. At that time a husband could rescind any vow his wife made if he did so within a day of the vow being made. Hannah, desperate, did not want this to happen, so she mouthed the words without actually speaking them aloud.

What was this vow to which Elkinah might have objected? That if God gave her a son, she would give this son back to God by dedicated him as a Nazirite, a holy man sworn to serve God all his life. 'He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head.' Verse 11.

If Elkanah had heard this vow, he would surely have objected. The boy after all would be his son as well as hers. So, she mouthed the words silently. (It is worth noting that at that time a clever deception was admired.)

The Neuroscience of Why Gratitude Makes Us Healthier

--by Ocean Robbins, Oct 30, 2013

Our world is pretty messed up. With all the violence, pollution and crazy things people do, it would be easy to turn into a grouchy old man without being either elderly or male. There's certainly no shortage of justification for disappointment and cynicism.

But consider this: Negative attitudes are bad for you. And gratitude, it turns out, makes you happier and healthier. If you invest in a way of seeing the world that is mean and frustrated, you're going to get a world that is, well, more mean and frustrating. But if you can find any authentic reason to give thanks, anything that is going right with the world or your life, and put your attention there, then statistics say you're going to be better off.

Does this mean to live in a state of constant denial and put your head in the sand? Of course not. Gratitude works when you're grateful for something real. Feeling euphoric and spending money like you just won the lottery when you didn't is probably going to make you real poor, real quick. But what are you actually grateful for? It's a question that could change your life.

Recent studies have concluded that the expression of gratitude can have profound and positive effects on our health, our moods and even the survival of our marriages.

As Drs. Blaire and Rita Justice reported for the University of Texas Health Science Center, "a growing body of research shows that gratitude is truly amazing in its physical and psychosocial benefits."

In one study on gratitude, conducted by Robert A. Emmons, Ph.D., at the University of California at Davis and his colleague Mike McCullough at the University of Miami, randomly assigned participants were given one of three tasks. Each week, participants kept a short journal. One group briefly described five things they were grateful for that had occurred in the past week, another five recorded daily hassles from the previous week that displeased them, and the neutral group was asked to list five events or circumstances that affected them, but they were not told whether to focus on the positive or on the negative. Ten weeks later, participants in the gratitude group felt better about their lives as a whole and were a full 25 percent happier than the hassled group. They reported fewer health complaints, and exercised an average of 1.5 hours more.

In a later study by Emmons, people were asked to write every day about things for which they were grateful. Not surprisingly, this daily practice led to greater increases in gratitude than did the weekly journaling in the first study. But the results showed another benefit: Participants in the gratitude group also reported offering others more emotional support or help with a personal problem, indicating that the gratitude exercise increased their goodwill towards others, or more technically, their "pro-social" motivation.

Another study on gratitude was conducted with adults having congenital and adult-onset neuromuscular disorders (NMDs), with the majority having post-polio syndrome (PPS). Compared to those who were not jotting down their blessings nightly, participants in the gratitude group reported

more hours of sleep each night, and feeling more refreshed upon awakening. The gratitude group also reported more satisfaction with their lives as a whole, felt more optimism about the upcoming week, and felt considerably more connected with others than did participants in the control group.

Perhaps most tellingly, the positive changes were markedly noticeable to others. According to the researchers, "Spouses of the participants in the gratitude (group) reported that the participants appeared to have higher subjective well-being than did the spouses of the participants in the control (group)."

There's an old saying that if you've forgotten the language of gratitude, you'll never be on speaking terms with happiness. It turns out this isn't just a fluffy idea. Several studies have shown depression to be inversely correlated to gratitude. It seems that the more grateful a person is, the less depressed they are. Philip Watkins, a clinical psychologist at Eastern Washington University, found that clinically depressed individuals showed significantly lower gratitude (nearly 50 percent less) than non-depressed controls.

Dr. John Gottman at the University of Washington has been researching marriages for two decades. The conclusion of all that research, he states, is that unless a couple is able to maintain a high ratio of positive to negative encounters (5:1 or greater), it is likely the marriage will end.

With 90 percent accuracy, Gottman says he can predict, often after only three minutes of observation, which marriages are likely to flourish and which are likely to flounder. The formula is that for every negative expression (a complaint, frown, put-down, expression of anger) there needs to be about five positive ones (smiles, compliments, laughter, expressions of appreciation and gratitude).

Apparently, positive vibes aren't just for hippies. If you want in on the fun, here are some simple things you can do to build positive momentum toward a more happy and fulfilling life:

- 1) Keep a daily journal of three things you are thankful for. This works well first thing in the morning, or just before you go to bed.
- 2) Make it a practice to tell a spouse, partner or friend something you appreciate about them every day.
- 3) Look in the mirror when you are brushing your teeth, and think about something you have done well recently or something you like about yourself.

Sure this world gives us plenty of reasons to despair. But when we get off the fast track to morbidity, and cultivate instead an attitude of gratitude, things don't just look better -- they actually get better. Thankfulness feels good, it's good for you and it's a blessing for the people around you, too. It's such a win-win-win that I'd say we have cause for gratitude...

Ocean Robbins is a father, author, speaker, facilitator, and the CEO of the Food Revolution Network.
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Militants Kill 305 at Sufi Mosque in Egypt's Deadliest Terrorist Attack

Nov 24, 2017

CAIRO — Militants detonated a bomb inside a crowded mosque in the Sinai Peninsula on Friday and then sprayed gunfire on panicked worshipers as they fled, killing at least 305 people and wounding at least 128 others. Officials called it the deadliest terrorist attack in Egypt's modern history.

The scale and ruthlessness of the assault, in an area racked by an Islamist insurgency, sent shock waves across the nation — not just for the number of deaths but also for the choice of target. Attacks on mosques are rare in Egypt, where the Islamic State has targeted Coptic Christian churches and pilgrims but avoided Muslim places of worship.

The attack injected a new element into Egypt's struggle with militants because most of the victims were Sufi Muslims, who practice a mystical form of Islam that the Islamic State and other Sunni extremist groups deem heretical. And it underscored the failure of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who has justified his harsh crackdown on political freedom in the name of crushing Islamic militancy, to deliver on his promises of security.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/24/world/middleeast/mosque-attack-egypt.html>