



2 PENTECOST  
JUNE 21/22, 2014

FIRSTLUTHERAN  
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

1 SAMUEL 1:27-2:10; PSALM 100; LUKE 17:11-19  
*The In-Between Place*

*Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Please join me in prayer: *Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Both the story about Hannah from the O.T., and the 10 Lepers from the Gospel of Luke, end well. Their requests are honored by God and their lives are changed for the good – forever.

But that's **not** how their stories **begin**...in fact, they all find themselves caught in that *in-between* place, that *no-man's land*, that *twilight zone* experience of waiting and wishing, wondering what the future holds, or worrying that maybe God just doesn't care.

Hannah's summary...

- One of two wives – the other was fertile but Hannah was barren
- Year after year, Hannah was made to feel unworthy
- Year after year, she would ask God to hear her prayers
- One year, praying in the temple, she even vowed that if God would give her a son, she would give him back to serve the Lord.
- Eli (priest) saw her praying, but accused her of being drunk and ordered her to leave the temple.

The Samaritan man with leprosy is another tragic case...

- He is doubly cursed: **hated** for coming from Samaria and **banished** from **society** for having leprosy
- Lepers were required to announce their presence by shouting out *Unclean! Unclean!* whenever they came close to healthy people.
- We don't know how long he'd been sick, but we know that people were terrified of leprosy – there was no cure...there was no hope...and yet together the men cried out, *Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!*

Now, the circumstances of **our** lives are vastly different from those biblical folks, but in **this** regard we are **all the same**:

- we, too**, have been/will find ourselves in our **own** version of that *in-between* place,
- we know what it's like to be stuck *out there*,
- what it feels like to be **unsure** of how things will turn out,
- unsure** if our prayers will be answered as asked,
- unsure** of how this challenging role in our one-act play of life will end.

Late at night, or at quiet moments during the day, our minds **wander**... and we **wonder**:

- will our hearts be *elevated* – or *de-flated*...,
- filled** with delight – or **drowned** in despair...,
- will we **sing** a **joyful** song of **praise** – or **cry** **bitter** tears of **lament**...?

**That's** the **in-between** place...and we don't like spending **any** time there... For **some** issues, it's a sojourn that lasts **only** a **day** or two, while **others** go on and on for years... Either way, it **often** seems to happen that **just** when we're at the **end** of our **rope**, we pray **one more time** like Hannah, or cry for help one more time like the lepers...*and God answers...!!!*

For some reason, the Priest **believes** that Hannah did not try to drown her sorrows away at the bar before coming to pray them away in the Temple. In fact, he even **assures** her that *God will grant her request!*

Hannah **leaves**, **be-lieves**, **con-ceives** and gives birth to a boy – names him **Samuel**, which means something like *heard by God*. And though Eli proves to be a woeful priest, he manages to raise Samuel to be a good prophet, one who both hears – and is heard by – God.

In a **similar** way, **Jesus** grants the request of the **10 men with leprosy** to be healed. He simply says, *Go, show yourselves to the priest* – and off they go, literally **climbing out** of the **grave**, **rising** from the **dead**, being **born anew** to **celebrate** this wonderful gift called **life**.

And in very similar ways, so you and I are heard by God, and sometimes our prayers are answered as asked, and our lives are truly blessed.

***Congratulations, you're pregnant! Or your cancer is in remission! Or a strained relationship is mended. Or a financial crisis is averted.***

A prayer is answered – and we know that the Lord has come to us in that in-between place to remind us of God's power, God's love, God's grace.

And the question **then** is: ***How do we show our thanks, how do we demonstrate our gratefulness, how do we respond to the ever-loving presence of God in our lives?***

**Hannah** returns to the temple to worship God – today's lesson is her song of praise thanking the Lord for answering her prayer – and **more** than that, for helping all people in need.

All ten men with leprosy are healed, but it is the **Samaritan** who returns praising God with a loud voice. Then he falls at Jesus' feet, thanking him, honoring him, worshiping him. All ten men are healed, but to **this** one, Jesus says, *Your faith has made you well.*

That one word is vitally important: **made well** – it comes from the root word *to save*. All ten were healed, but this Samaritan was **saved, made whole, re-born** as a child of God.

**Hannah returns and worships God. The Samaritan returns and worships God. What do you suppose the lesson is here for us??**

There is a great little story entitled Babette's Feast written by Isaak Dineson (her real name is Karen Blixen – who also wrote the famous novel Out of Africa). Babette is a woman caught in that in-between place with nowhere to go, no family to love, no hope for the future...

It's during the terrible days following the French Revolution when many upper crust members of society were tortured and killed. Babette, a famous chef in Paris – and Roman Catholic by faith – flees for her life and seeks refuge in a conservative little Lutheran town.

The movie is set in a village on the bleak north coast of Denmark. It's a community that was founded by a pious Lutheran minister – **so** pious that he names his two daughters **Martine** (after Martin Luther) and **Phillipa** (after Luther's colleague, Philip Melancthon)!!

Years pass, the old pastor is dead, yet the daughters have forsaken marriage that they might continue to shepherd the faithful few who still remain. They are serious about their faith – and about caring for the poor in the community – feeding them Lutefisk and a stale ale soup.

They agree to give Babette shelter, and she immediately goes to work with them, fixing meals to help the poor. But where the sisters had stuck to their tried and true recipes, Babette starts to introduce some flavor. Very quickly those folks are **eager** to eat their meals, rather than just being thankful for any food at all.

After a number of years of this same routine, something incredible happens to Babette. She wins the French lottery – a small fortune. The sisters are happy for her, and sad for themselves because they are sure the French woman will now move back to France. Yet Babette surprises them by asking the community's permission to make for them a dinner, one that she was famous for serving in her fancy restaurant.

Reluctantly they agree – but quickly wish they hadn't. Babette sends for supplies and in they start to role: quail and a tortoise, crates of wine and boxes of cheese, the extravagance is very unsettling to those tight-fisted Lutherans! But they gave her their permission, so they let her continue...

However, in order to help themselves **not** fall victim to the *sins of the flesh*...they make a pact to eat the meal – **but not enjoy it!!!**

It's a promise that quickly crumbles once those amazing flavors touch their lips: salad and bread, meat and dessert, wine and cheese... In fact, before long, these sour-faced saints are actually **smiling** – even **laughing!** And **more** so, they dare even to confess petty sins to one another, and ask – and grant – forgiveness. Babette's feast helps them

re-discover the love – God’s love for them and their love for each other - that had brought them together in the first place.

Yet their joy is tempered with fears that Babette will now **leave** them – until they discover that she is once again penniless – their friend had spent **every last cent of her fortune** on this one meal. Babette had created for them a work of art to thank them for taking her in.

Those pious disciples celebrate the meal – and the news that Babette will stay – by gathering in the town square, holding hands, and singing for joy the praises of God. **They respond by worshipping the Lord.**

In response to **her** blessing, **Hannah** returns to the temple and sings a song of praise to God.

In response to **his** blessing, the **Samaritan** man returns to Jesus and worships the Lord.

In response to **their** blessing by **Babette**, the **community forgives** past hurts, **celebrates** their mutual love, then **gathers** in a circle to **worship**, singing songs of praise to God.

Each of these stories ends **not** with the miracle of *prayer-answered-as-asked*, but with the **response** of these people to God’s goodness. **They praise God. They give God thanks.** They demonstrate a *from-the-bottom-of-my-heart* expression of gratitude and love...

Such stories are meant to inspire **us** to embrace the **same** response to the many blessings that God has poured out in your life and mine. In short, these characters ask us: **How do you show your gratitude to God?**

Please turn to Psalm 100 – in conclusion, we will recite it by verse and discover there the key to a life of praise and thanksgiving.

[Link to Psalm 100](#)

Amen.