

Text: 1 Samuel 1:21-28. Seventh Sunday of Easter. **June 1, 2014.**

Be patient and wait for the Lord. Amen.

We don't like to wait. I'm not real happy that there is a second stoplight between my house and church and so now it sometimes takes six minutes to make the drive instead of five. The store is called, "Get it now!" The commercial says, "It's my money and I want it now!" And what they don't tell you is the exorbitant interest you will pay. We have credit cards to buy it now. I had a friend who refused to eat macaroni and cheese because he had to wait nine minutes for the noodles to boil. Now you can buy mac and cheese to put in the microwave. It only takes 90 seconds. How many more examples should I give? We don't like to wait. Patience is a virtue, a virtue someone else can have.

But I had a teacher in high school who was my cross country coach. We were just starting cross country running and trying to get enough for a team. It was a struggle the first few years. But he always said, "Patience is gold, and someday I'm going to strike it rich." Patience is gold and someday I'm going to strike it rich. This Sunday we are celebrating a Sunday of patience. Jesus has just ascended into heaven. He told his followers to do the worst thing of all: wait. Wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit. Wait until I send you power from on high. They had no idea how long that was going to be. Wait. Wait. Wait.

The lesson in front of us from 1 Samuel is another example of someone who had to wait. Hannah was a woman of great faith, but a woman who was childless. That was rarely a choice at that time. It was a great disgrace. People thought God had it out for you. People would make fun of you. At the times of year when everyone else was happiest, Hannah was saddest. When everyone else would go to the house of the LORD and celebrate with their families, the childless Hannah had only her husband and crowds of strangers staring at the barren woman.

But in spite of this sadness, this apparent disgrace, Hannah was patient. She prayed, over and over, for many years, "Lord, give me a child." One year at the house of the LORD Hannah made this weeping prayer in bitterness of soul, "O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life." Hannah was patient. Her patience was gold. She struck it rich. The LORD gave her a son. She named him Samuel, which means, "God hears."

Let's not overlook Hannah's husband and his faith and patience either. When Hannah struggled through her barren days, Elkanah her husband was comforting, encouraging, loving, patient. When Hannah made the vow to give the child to the LORD, Elkanah could have nullified the vow. But he didn't. We marvel at the faith and sacrifice of Hannah in giving her son back to LORD. Marvel also at the faith of Elkanah, who was also giving a son back to the LORD.

Let's look at that sacrifice a little more closely. It's really pretty astonishing. First Hannah weaned her son. At that time, that lasted not three to five months, but often three to five years. There was no baby food or formula or even blenders. Mothers nursed their children for three to five years. Whew! I know that takes a moment to digest. So we'll take a deep breath. But doesn't that add to the phrase, she took the child, young as he was and brought him to the house of the LORD. Hannah and Elkanah took their preschool aged son and brought him to the house of the LORD and left him there, young as he was. Young as he was, they dedicated him to the LORD. Their one and only son, they dedicated to the LORD, young as he was. Can you imagine leaving a preschooler at boarding school, young as he was? Young as he was, they trusted the LORD to take care of him. Young as he was, they recognized this child was a special gift from the LORD. Young as he was, this child was part of God's plan to do some amazing things, I mean, he has two books of the Bible named after him. Hannah and Elkanah were patient. Their patience was gold. They struck it rich.

And so they had no problem giving some of those riches back to the LORD. Notice how Hannah and Elkanah saw their son, their food, their drink. It was all a gift from God. Returning their son, bringing their offerings, it all came from God. They were only giving a little back.

Well, actually, it wasn't a little. It's easy for us to read about their offering and feel confused. A bull? What's an ephah? How much is a skin? Let's take a look. A three year old bull was a valuable animal. It is fully mature. It can plow so you can sow your seed and a three year old bull can sow his seed. It's a precious commodity, one with many good years remaining. Now consider that it's possible that Hannah brought not just one three year old bull, but three bulls. The law required one bull, not three. The law required 1/3 of an ephah for a sacrifice. She didn't stop at 1/3. She brought a full ephah, which is about half a bushel. The law required half a skin of wine. She brought a full skin. She brought double or triple what the law required. You see, she didn't stop with law. She was motivated by love. That's worth repeating. Her offering was not motivated by law. Her offering was motivated by love. Hannah didn't offer as little as the law required. Hannah offered as much as her love compelled. Her patience was gold. She struck it rich with a child. She couldn't help but return some of those riches to the LORD.

Is this our attitude? I know God put these examples of believers in the Bible to encourage us and teach us, not so much to shame us, but there is a part of me that is convicted of my sin. Am I so patient with my prayers? If I have a disagreement with someone, do I just pray, "God change them to see it my way"? Then when they don't change, do I give up? Do I see that maybe God wants me to change? How many of you prayed for children? Did you exhibit the patience of Hannah, praying for years? Was your soul bitter, even angry at God? Did your patience wear thin, wear out? Would any of us be willing to give that one and only child, that special answer to prayer so directly back to the LORD, at three years old? Would we be more likely to protect that gift and never let him go, not even to God? What about our offerings? Are we motivated solely by love? Or do we need the plea of a broke church treasurer, an empty church bank account? Yes, the patience, the offerings, the sacrifice, they all point out our sins.

But don't look only at your sins, look at the patience, the offering, the sacrifice God made for you. God sacrificed his own Son, his one and only Son, not just to live in a temple, but to come and live on our earth! God offered up his Son, not just to live away from home, but to die on a cross! To die on a cross! For God, no sacrifice was too great for you. He loved you that much. For God, no offering was too much for you. He offered up his Son! For God, no patience was too much for you. God is patient with you. He holds out his hands all day long, begging you to come, wanting you to run into his open arms, to find his forgiveness, to relish his love, to treasure his sacrifice.

God is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to be in heaven. God's patience, God's sacrifice, God's offering, they change our attitudes. Offerings to God are not measured or motivated by law. Offerings are motivated by love, love that compels us. Love that says, "Jesus died for me. I'm going to live for him." Our sacrifices are just that, sacrifices. It wasn't easy for Hannah and Elkanah to give up the son they loved. Maybe we will have to sacrifice a friend who is constantly leading us away from God. Maybe we will have to sacrifice a house, a job, a hobby that is getting in the way of our relationship with Jesus. Maybe we will just have to be patient. That might be the hardest thing of all. To just be patient and trust in the LORD. To keep praying. To never give up, even when it seems hopeless. Often it's when we give up on ourselves that the LORD steps in to show us, "It never was about you. It was always about me. I just made you wait until you saw that."

So what are you waiting for? What requires your golden patience? Are you trying to get enough together for a family vacation this summer? Patience is gold. Are you praying for an end to suffering, a pain you've had so long you can't remember not having it? Patience is gold. The suffering will end. Here on earth, or maybe in heaven. Do you know what happened with my high school cross country coach, the guy who said, "Patience is gold and someday I'm going to strike it rich"? One day he was running with the cross country team. He had a heart attack and went to heaven a couple days later. I always thought he was talking about being patient in getting more people to come out for cross country. Maybe he was talking about striking it rich with a greater treasure, going to heaven. Heaven. That's a treasure worth waiting for. Heaven. That's striking it rich. Amen.