

A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church
By Chris Fillingham
“Keep Singing”
1 Samuel 2:1-10
October 16, 2016

A few years ago, a friend of mine got it in his head that he was going to learn the guitar and start singing, because when he sang, he sounded like Johnny Cash. This was a surprise to me because I hadn't really heard my friend sing before. Being that he's a 3 on the Enneagram, he was eager to show off his artistic voice and impress Jessi and me

So, he started singing “Ring of Fire” ...and I looked over at Jessi, who looked over at me... and we both started laughing. My friend was dead serious, but he wasn't even close.

I know it's not nice, but we couldn't help it. Besides, that's what good friends are for, right? Somebody had to tell him, and I think his wife was relieved it was us... because as soon as we started laughing, she started giggling too.

He's still one of my best friends, but singing is never going to be his forte.

That doesn't stop him, though, and I'm glad it doesn't. He did give up on the whole guitar/Johnny Cash thing, but he still sings. In fact, he grew up in a quazi-charismatic church like I did. So, every now and then the two of us will bust out in one of our old 1980's charismatic songs together.

It's a lot of fun, even if it's not pretty. We don't sing to sound good, we sing because... because sometimes you just want to sing!

There doesn't have to be a reason, does there? It's fun. And these songs are in us, and they want to come out.

You know what that's like. We all do this from time to time... or at least you did when you were younger and less inhibited. You know you did!

And every now and then it will still come out. You're giving your kids a bath and before you know it, **“Splish splash I was takin' a bath...”**

You're on a hike with your kids and out of nowhere, **“The ants go marching one by one hurrah...”**

Or you're in the shower... and that's where you **bust out into some operatic masterpiece, don't you?** And let's be honest, you're pretty impressed with how great you sound there in the shower.

There's no real reason for all this singing. It's just that in some moment these songs come bubbling out of us. You're working in the yard or doing chores around the house and before you know it, Bob Dylan just comes out.

Shoot, you might not even like Bob Dylan. You might not be able to stand that voice of his. But you can't get away from his songs, especially now that he's being awarded the Nobel Prize.

Like it or not, his lyrics are going to follow you around and every now and then, they just come out of you, don't they?

That's how good songs work. They live inside your soul and in the right moment, they just come out. Maybe nothing at all is going on... or maybe you're surprised by grace or beauty... and suddenly you're singing, **"In the Lord, I'll be ever thankful..."**

Something happens and these songs just come. ***Singing is part of our human experience. It's part of our natural inborn spirituality. We sing because something in us wants to sing... something comes bubbling out of our souls.***

Sometimes it's lament...

Sometimes it's silliness...

Sometimes it's doxology.

But these songs live in your soul and in the right moment, one of them just comes out.

It did for Hannah anyway. Apparently Hannah liked to sing and so she starts singing here in Chapter 2. Which got me thinking about all the songs that Hannah may have sung along the way.

Back in chapter one, when she only knew barrenness, and she was hurting and felt all alone in the world, she was probably singing a very different song. Maybe some morning when she was by herself she started to sing **"How does it feel to be without a home? like a complete unknown? like a rollin' stone?"**

I'm telling you, Hannah was a singin'.

And once Samuel was born, I imagine she sang to him all the time. In the middle of the night, he'd start wailin' the way babies do. And she'd go in and start singing to her little man... and wonder about that day she was going to bring him back to the temple... and she'd sing, [sing] **"How many roads must a man walk down, before they call him a man?"**

Hannah sang... just like you and me. It's what we all do... or at least it's what our souls do when they aren't held back by the thought of your friends laughing at you.

Songs live in your soul and in the right moment, one of them just comes out.

That's what happens to Hannah in our story this morning. In fact, scholars suggest that this song she's singing is some song she's probably known for a long time. It was probably part of Israel's national hymnody... the way Bob Dylan lyrics have become part of our national hymnody.

I mean, if you read the whole song, it's pretty obvious that this isn't a song that's really about her and Samuel. It's a song about her world... and God's work in it. It's about the poor being raised up and the wealthy brought low. It's about God judging their

enemies and giving strength to the King. In fact, it's a political song because... well...
"We live in a political word."

She's singing about what God has done, but ironically, none of this has happened. In fact, there's no King in Israel yet. Hannah's story is just before the time of the kings. But her song is here at the beginning of 1 and 2 Samuel because it will begin to reverberate in this story. You see, Samuel, this little boy of hers, will be the first one in Israel to appoint kings and to bring them down.

Samuel will grow up and appoint Saul as the first king. But when Saul stops following the Lord, Samuel will announce that Saul is no longer God's anointed. So, he'll probably go out and sing himself:

**"Don't follow leaders,
and watch the parking meters..."**

And Samuel will begin a coup by anointing David as a new King... So, here in 1 Samuel, **"The times, they are a changin'"**

And this song that Hannah sings... this song that just comes out of her... is a reminder to them and to us... ***that even in these changing times, God is the ruler of this world, and no King, no government can take God's place.*** Her song is reminding us that our hope and joy doesn't ultimately come from our political leaders... something we especially need to remember about now.

It's a song reminding us that our ultimate hope is in God... Maker of heaven and earth,

the One who is making all things new,
the One who raises the poor and the humble,
and brings down the proud and arrogant.

This song just comes out of Hannah as she brings her little boy to the temple.

And I kept thinking this week about how surprising it is that she's singing with such joy at this particular moment.

I mean, she's dropping off her little boy, her only child, at the temple to be raised there in the temple. I keep thinking how choked up most parents get dropping their 18 year old off at college for the first time.

But Samuel... he's probably 3 or 4 years old. And she brings him to the temple to give him back to God. And when she does, she breaks out in doxology, **"My heart rejoices in the LORD!"** And sure, maybe she's just ecstatic... to finally get a full night's sleep.

But I have a hunch something else is going on here... something that is filling her with celebration... with joy... at the most surprising kind of moment. Somehow by taking this great gift she was given, and giving him back to God, she is caught up in a holy mystery of celebration and joy.

The only way this makes sense is if she doesn't see this moment as somehow losing her little boy. Instead, she experiences it as if they are entering into something wonderful. It's as if the two of them, both together, are being caught up in something much larger... something holy and wonderful... that you can't help but break out in doxology.

As I was thinking about all this, I began to think about what it means to be caught up in the life of God. I began to think about the Trinity, and how within the Godhead there is this eternal dance. That's how the early Church Fathers described it. There is this one dance of love, loving and being loved.

In fact, God's very life is the dance of love that is flowing between Father, Son and Holy Spirit... and it's the energy of this dance of love that creates and sustains... or as we read in the Call to Worship, that enables, and enfolds, and enlivens the very universe. It's the energy that is created in there in the Godhead that is spilling out creating this life of ours.

And here's the beautiful thing: This dance, this love, flowing in the Trinity, is the reality into which we are always being invited. Part of faith is leaning to recognize and live in this joyful dance.

In fact, the mystics would tell us that we're never really on the outside of this dance of love. We're always within it. God is the One in whom we live and move and have our being, Paul says. It's just that we don't always recognize it. We're not aware of it.

But in those moments, when you are more aware... and you get a taste of this mystical joy and life of our Trinitarian God flowing around you, you can't help being caught up in celebration and gratitude.

Of course, Hannah had no concept of the Trinity. I know that. But, **“You don't need a weather man to know which way the wind blows.”** (Sorry I can't help myself!)

The point is, you don't have to understand the Trinity to experience the Love and Life of God that is joyfully dancing around you, inviting you into its life.

I think that's what must be happening for Hannah. She's giving Samuel back to God, but she's not losing something. She's being caught up in something.

She's so full of joy because she knows that he already is God's, not hers. In fact, all of it is.

Her life. Her child.

All of it together, both of them,

are being caught up in the joyful life of God.

And so she sings:

My heart rejoices in the Lord.

My strength rises up in the Lord!

No one is holy like the Lord—

There is no rock like our God!

She's full of joy and song, because she's experiencing this moment of living in the dance of God's love... a love and a dance that is so much bigger than her own life.

Maybe you know what that's like... to be caught up in joy and mystery. Or maybe you did when you were a child, but now you've forgotten...

life hasn't let you see it lately,

or your cynicism has kept you closed off from it...

or you've been so busy chasing after your calendar and your career, that there simply hasn't been time to stop and celebrate...

to dance and sing like you did when you were little.

I know that's happened to me along the way. And if that's true for you, then maybe it's time to remember again that there is a dance of love around you.

Maybe it's time to close your eyes and open your heart and see again that there is something much larger your life is part of... and begin to sing.

That's what happened to another young woman many, many years later. One day this young teenager girl sees an angel and hears that the Holy Spirit is going to come upon her.

She realizes that her life is being caught up with God's life... And so she goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth. And while she's there, Mary begins to sing this song too.

Mary's Magnificat is an echo of Hannah's song... Mary gets caught up in the mysterious and wonderful life of God and sings many of the same lines and melodies that Hannah sang.

And Mary's song reverberated forward into the life of Jesus... the way Hannah's song did with Samuel. And both their songs are still reverberating in our lives today.

That's how all this singing works. We sing because we're caught up in something, and when we do... it sows more seeds of life and joy. Our song reverberates in our world... and our world is opened up to the blessedness of God's life... dancing around us.

So, beloved,

Raise your voice with Hannah and Mary. And not just them...

Raise your voice with Moses and Miriam who also sang. They sang after crossing the Red Sea.

And raise your voice with Elizabeth and Zachariah, who sang at the birth of their son, John the Baptist.

And raise your voice with Simeon and Anna... who, when they encountered Jesus as a baby in the temple, sang with hope, "O God, you can let me lie in peace, because my eyes have now seen your salvation."

Raise your voice with the Saints of God, and keep singing.
Sing and let yourself be caught up in the very life and dance of God.
Amen.

Reflection:

*My life goes on in endless song
above earth's lamentations,
I hear the real, though far-off hymn
that hails a new creation.*

*No storm can shake my inmost calm,
While to that rock I'm clinging.
Since love is lord of heaven and earth
How can I keep from singing?*