**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**September 25th, 2022**

**Where Does It Hurt?**

1. **Introduction**

This week, we are into our third week of the series, “I’ve been meaning to ask…” which invites us to live in authentic curiosity with one another. In the last two weeks, just as a brief recap, we’ve been able to assert that we can celebrate both the diversity and differences among us, while also remembering that we are all called beloved by God. In our second week, we thought about those spaces where people aren’t often called beloved – the places that are hidden from view, those with a bad reputation – and how we, as the body of Christ, can continue to strive towards a kingdom of equality.

This week, we come upon our second question, “Where does it hurt?” The question itself points to our humanity, the vulnerability that we are called to live into as a community, and the safe spaces that need to be made as we grow together in Christ. The short clip we just saw speaks to the power of such a question. When I ask you, “Where does it hurt?” – I want to validate that there may be pain within you and I want you to have a place where you can share your story and be heard. I want you to know that you aren’t alone – we all have unique stories, but as humans, we can come together to feel less alone.

Someday, one of my bucket list dreams is to write a book called, “Little Griefs.” The title isn’t to minimize grief, but to acknowledge that we all walk around holding something. Maybe it seems small – one of your friends is moving away, you didn’t do as well as you hoped on a school or work report, or your car broke down and you lost a day’s worth of errands and feel behind. You can tell me, “That’s not grief, it’s an inconvenience” – but it is, just on a smaller scale of what you ordinarily think of as grief. It needs to be validated, it needs to be heard, and I hope this is a place where you can say what you need to say.

Of course, there are those bigger griefs, right? The loss of a family member, the feeling of hopelessness that Hannah felt in our Old Testament reading, or maybe something that words cannot even name. The church needs to be a place to validate those wounds, to stand and stick with you in it, and to be heard even when the words are hard to speak. That, for me, that is Christ’s church and community at its very best – a place to grow, a place to learn how to live our faith, and a place where we can truly say, “I belong.”

1. Hannah

As we come to our Old Testament reading this morning, we

come to a lesson that is truly difficult to hear. If you’ve experienced infertility or loss, I know that this is especially a hard reading, and before I dig in, I want to say – if you are suffering or have suffered in the past, please reach out to me, or reach out to someone in the community that you can lean on. I want you to know that as I share this story, you are not alone.

In Hannah’s story, I feel like her sister and Eli are the examples of what we are not called to do when someone is suffering. Hannah’s sister prods her, irritates her, and seems to be showing off all her sons and daughters. I don’t know if it’s sibling rivalry at play, but regardless, as a sister, she could have come in with comfort, understanding, and a different voice that honors her sister’s pain.

Eli is an interesting character here, because you see, he’s kind of a big deal. He’s a priest, so we expect better of him – we anticipate he will automatically see her pain and be present with her in it. Instead, he assumes she’s drunk – because weeping and silently praying and the distress, for whatever reason, made him think she was drinking. Now, he does correct himself, but it requires Hannah to be brutally honest about her pain. Maybe that was a moment of learning for Eli – a moment where he stepped back and saw that he could have done better – maybe it was formative. Yet…it was painful for Hannah at the same.

And you can hear Hannah’s grief, can’t you? Can you feel the guttural struggle she is in as she prays. She says, “Look on the misery of your servant, remember me, do not forget your servant.” It sounds like one of the lament psalms – where it feels like God is up in Heaven and not active in the world at all and you feel paralyzed and lonely. Hannah goes further and even goes in with a bribe, and if we’re honest – haven’t we tried to win over God in prayer with a “if you do x, I’ll do y” formula. You hear this when she says that if she has a male child, he will be pure and clean and be a nazritie.

The line that really hits my heart most deeply is this one, “I am a woman deeply troubled.” That’s a powerful, powerful moment of vulnerability. She could have walked out of the temple, she could have thought Eli was cruel, but she chose to be honest. She shared her story, and after Eli blessed her, she finally felt some sense of resolve and peace.

1. Peace

When I hear Hannah’s story, I think of her bravery, her courage, and her willingness to get on her knees and be honest about what she needs to share. Then she feels peace. It’s only after the story is told, it’s only after she says what she needs to say – that she feels that sense of peace.

That’s one of the beautiful parts about community, even as a pastor, in a boundaried way, I know there are people I can go up to and share my story with and they will not seek to fix my problems, yet they will hear me. There is something about being seen, not to receive pity, but to no longer hold the story inside anymore. Once you share your story, it loses some of its destructive power. Once it is validated, the shame and guilt that may surround you is diminished. Sharing our stories is powerful work, exhausting work, in fact, and I know it’s not fun, but it’s vital work we need to do to fully live into the abundance that God calls us to and to be a more present member of this body in Christ.

1. Stories

I’m not sure if you have a story you need to share. I’m not sure if

you are called to listen. Let’s unpack these two ideas a little bit further.

How do you share your story? First, I would encourage you to find someone who you consider to be a ‘safe space’ – someone who you trust to hold you in that vulnerable space. Maybe it’s a spouse, or a best friend, or a parent, your pastor, or a therapist – but find that person who can hear your story and feel safe. They may not respond in the way you want or in the way you need – many folks feel like they need to fix a situation – so you may need to tell the person you are sharing your story with what you need. Maybe you need to say, “I’m not looking for pity, I’m not looking for you to fix it – I just want you to hear my story.” I pray that as you share your story, you feel the peace that Hannah felt as she shared her own reality.

If you are in a position to listen to a story, I ask you one favor – whatever you do…please do not use platitudes. God did not do something to teach someone a lesson. There might be a new angel in Heaven, but that necessarily the most comforting words you can share in fresh and raw grief. And the platitude I like the least, “Everything happens for a reason.” Does it? I don’t know the will of God, no one does, but I never found the statement comforting.

When you listen, simply listen. If you feel inclined to speak, be uncomfortable and wait a moment before you jump in. There might be some silence, it might feel weird, and that’s okay. Someone has invited you into their story and that is an honor to be present with, so simply listen. If your mind drifts, that’s normal, just refocus. Just seek to be present.

V. Conclusion

My prayer is that as you hear Hannah’s story, you do not hear weakness, but incredible strength. You see a woman who names what she needs, tells her story, and finds peace. My prayer for your lives is that you find a similar resonance – that you are able to articulate what you need, that you share your story, or maybe that as you listen to a story, you are all able to find a greater and deeper sense of peace.

This, my friends, is hard work, yet it is the hard work that Christ calls us to as a community of faith. Let us be bold, let us lean in, and let us ask, “Where does it hurt?” as we grow, learn, and be further emboldened to share our story and our faith. Amen.