

Where Does It Hurt?
I Samuel 1:1-18
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

In her new book *More Than a Womb*, Dr. Lisa Wilson Davison writes this dedication, “This book is dedicated to women who, by choice or circumstance, are not mothers and have experienced shaming by others that they are somehow not fully a woman. You are enough” (Published by Cascade Books, 2021).

How many of us, for any variety of reasons, due to any variety of circumstances that cause hurt, need a place where we hear that we are enough?

And how would Hannah’s story have been different if she had had such a place?

See, one of the struggles with the story of Hannah is that she gets a baby rather than a safe place to be whole without one.

Now, don’t get me wrong...Hannah wanted a baby and I have no doubt that she was glad when she realized he was going to make his way into her life.

But, meanwhile, we are fixers. We like to push past the pain and just move on to a solution or even a distraction. And the expectation of motherhood was so present in Hannah’s identity as a woman of her time (honestly still present for the identity of women in our time), but that expectation was so present that it is hard to imagine Hannah ever even got the chance to ask, to wonder, what life might be like if she were childless by choice.

So, we *can* rejoice with Hannah at the birth of her son, Samuel. *And* we can do this as we wonder what would have been different if she had had a safe place to talk about her pain, whether that were the pain of wanting a child and seeming to be unable to have one, or the pain of not knowing how to live without conforming to her culture.

Hannah didn’t have this safe space among her peers, certainly not with Penninah. She didn’t even have it with her beloved husband who couldn’t quite understand why *he* wasn’t enough, who wasn’t quite willing or able to put himself in her shoes and experience the pressures - both within and outside Hannah - that were tied to motherhood.

Finally, the priest Eli listened...though not at first...but finally he did...after Hannah demanded he set down his assumptions and come to know her situation.

And if we pay attention, we are reminded again and again throughout both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, throughout the whole of our Bible, that God listens. Ultimately

this is a story of God creating a safe space for Hannah to name her hurts and to be heard.

But, friends, we - as people of God - have a responsibility to do a better job creating space for other people's honesty, for their hurts as well as their wholeness, for their grief as well as their joy, for their bitterness as well as their celebration.

It seems too often we are afraid of other people's pain...afraid to get too close...afraid it will rub off...afraid we might have to see our own pain as well.

And yet ours is a God whose intention is to *be* safe space for us. We, as Christians, follow Jesus who paid attention in such a way that he came in contact with the places of deepest hurts in people and didn't shy away.

Remember the story of Jesus in Mark 5? There is a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. When Jesus came near she had confidence that he could heal her if only she could touch his cloak. That's how confident she was. She didn't ask for an audience with him, she didn't even need to touch him...just a piece of his clothing.

And yet, when she did, he stopped, he spoke, he acknowledged her pain, he offered her not only healing, but a safe place to name her situation.

If this is who our God is? If this is who Jesus is? Then, Church, is it not who we are called to be?

I invite you now to consider these questions as you listen to the reflections of Rev. Brittany Fiscus-van Rossum. (Play video from A Sanctified Art, <https://sanctifiedart.org>)

So, friends, how do we do that?

How do we create communities where we say to another that I value you enough to ask, to listen, and to accept your response?

How do we create communities where we can acknowledge that sometimes we don't want to ask about someone else's pain...but where we do it anyway because we need to be human with each other?

How do we create communities where we sit with the question, "Where does it hurt?" rather than rushing forward into the questions, "What can I do?" or "How can I fix it."

How do we create communities where we create space to be present with each other in all the messiness of this life...where we are willing to bear witness to each other's pain?

A friend of mine who is going through treatment for cancer recently wrote this on her Facebook page, *"I just want to say something I've been thinking about a LOT, and I*

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hope it comes forth without judgment and in a spirit of love. People often say about a person with serious illness that they “never complain/ed,” with a level of admiration reserved for heroes. And I know that not complaining is meant to represent strength, positivity, and selflessness. I also know that it is easier for loved ones to think that never complaining means on some level that the pain is not unbearable. No one wants to think about their loved one suffering. But as a person who is uncomfortable at best and often in great pain on a daily basis, this can be a hard thing to hear. It makes me feel like I have 2 options: 1) be honest and say when I am suffering, or 2) say nothing at all (and suffer in silence).

“You see how these are very hard options? I know the people in my life who want an honest answer from me. I know that most people who are a significant person in my life will love me no matter what I choose to say. But there are days when I just want to stay out of everything because the pressure to not be a complainer is strong. And sometimes I just find that unfair.

“Couldn’t we get to a place as a culture where it is okay to be open and honest about pain? To see it as a good thing to be able to say, ‘Today I hurt a lot. I hurt yesterday, and I may hurt tomorrow. I don’t like it, but it is my reality. I am strong and I am facing it.’

“I am grateful that so many people ask how I am. But I want to normalize talking about it. I think we all deserve that.”

So, friends, where is your pain?

Where is your safe space to name it, without apology? Where is the place where you can say, “I hurt,” without having to minimize it or, on the other hand, to maximize it as if you need to have the biggest pain in the world in order to justify naming it?

And how can we create safe spaces together?

As people of God, may we be willing to ask and then to listen without judgment. May we be willing to let people name their pain without the pressure to fix it for them or ask them to simply move on. May we be willing to create spaces that truly are safe for everyone.

As people of God, may we be willing to open up and to trust that there is a community of care around us. May we be willing to risk the courage it takes to admit our pain.

As people of God, may we be willing to companion with one another, and as our God does, may we be willing to hurt with those who are hurting, to create safe space for all.

May it be so.