

Maidservants

Sunday, May 12, 2024 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

1 Samuel 2:1-10; Luke 1:35-38 The Seventh Sunday of Easter and Mother's Day

- Introduction

The Rev. Dr. Ashley Cleere, the Executive Director of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, is taking leave of her work to respond to a call to ministry with the Center Church on the Green in New Haven, Connecticut, the oldest church in New Haven. The current building was constructed over a small portion of an old graveyard with all the graves left intact. Thus, there are 137 graves in the basement of the church with several of New Haven's founders. It dates all the way back to 1687. The people buried there include Benedict Arnold's first wife, the family of President Rutherford B. Hayes, one of the founders of Yale, and, most importantly, Sarah Whiting, born in 1669 and buried in 1726. The stone says that she was the "painful mother of eight children of whom six survive, faithful, virtuous and weary."* This is true of many mothers. They are faithful, virtuous and they give themselves away. They trust in the Almighty and they spend their lives investing in others. There are men and women who are not mothers who have done the same, but when we think of someone who spends their lives in service and in enriching other people we often think of mothers. One described herself as "the maidservant of the Lord." It is a humble description, but also one deserving much honor and respect.

- Set the stage

Hannah, mother of Samuel.

In our first passage of Scripture, we find the plight of Hannah, a young wife who wants to have children more than anything. She and her husband are making an annual pilgrimage to Shiloh, the ancient site of the Tabernacle. The high priest of the setting is Eli, assisted by his two corrupt sons. When Eli sees Hannah praying, he assumes erroneously

that she is drunk, but blesses her when corrected. Hannah never hears any message from God, though her son, Samuel, will do so. She hears a "yes" from God when her son is born. It took some time, but it happened to the young woman who referred to herself as the "maidservant" seeking the favor of God. After this, Hannah writes a beautiful poem about the power and sovereignty of God, one that another mother turns to for inspiration.

Mary, mother of Jesus

In Luke's Gospel, centuries later, a young lady in very different circumstances demonstrates the same reverent and healthy attitude. The Angel Gabriel visits Mary, who is engaged to Joseph, to tell her that she will give birth to a son, and to name Him Jesus, and that He will be the Messiah. The circumstances are difficult. She and Joseph are engaged but not yet married in a culture that requires a divorce for an engagement to be broken. Joseph would be suspicious (and he was). People might talk (and they probably did). But Mary, despite her concern and confusion, makes this classic statement of attitude in verse 38 when she said, "Behold, the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. We have no record that she ever saw him again in her lifetime on earth. But she was positioned to receive blessing unlike anything anyone else has ever enjoyed throughout the history of humanity. And she writes a poem about the power and sovereignty of God, with Hannah's poem providing much of the inspiration.

- **Main Point and Application:** Hearing the voice of God is more of attitude than of experience.

The point is that attitude is essential to hearing, in whatever fashion, the voice of the Holy Spirit. He speaks in numerous ways. First of all, most of what the Holy Spirit will ever need to say to you is already found in Scripture, so a good working knowledge of the Scriptures makes all the difference in the world. Also, times of quiet listening and reflection allows the Holy Spirit opportunity to speak to your conscience. Biblically, the Spirit does work through dreams and intuition, but we can easily mistake

such things as being more than our imagination when it is not. But, looking at these two passages, particularly Mary's response to Gabriel in Luke, attitude provides the Holy Spirit crucial access to you. You may hear nothing, but your character changes, your understanding of Scripture grows, your prayer life deepens and your whole worldview develops. "Behold, the servant of the Lord," an attitude of humility before God, is the attitude that makes all the difference. These two mothers set the example also in that they invest in others, in their sons and families. It is a challenge to us that Christ also invests so much in us and calls us to do likewise.

One of the best descriptions of this attitude is in Philippians 2:5-8

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: (6) Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: (7) But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: (8) And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Sgt. Phillips

People who are humble before the Lord and spend their time investing in others are in a position to be used by the Holy Spirit. They are servant leaders. Here's a description of the value of a servant's heart from an article written by Sgt. Ashley Phillips of the US Marine Corps. "In a job interview recently, the hiring manager corrected me after I talked about my leadership experience. He said, "It sounds more to me like you're a servant leader." What's the difference?

Answer: It's been said often that someone with a military background is a natural leader. You've been taught to take risks, assume accountability, face adversity and uncertainty, and care for those around you. Leadership is that act of leading and influencing others in a team, organization, or initiative.

Servant leadership takes leadership one step further. A servant leader -- someone who leads with a servant heart -- describes a philosophy that is selfless, focused on others and not about power, fame or credit. A servant

leader truly is more concerned and passionate about bettering the environment or those they lead than taking control.” Sgt. Ashley Phillips US Marines* *

Note how he describes leading with a servant’s heart as taking leadership to the next level. As mentioned before, I can think of examples of this attitude in people who are not mothers, but mothers are still what first comes to mind.

- Conclusion

In conclusion, when it comes to the question of hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit, “how” or “is it possible” may be less important than “do I have the right attitude?” “Behold, the servant of the Lord, may it be to me according to your word” is the right way to look at ourselves, at life, at God. It was two mothers who invested their lives in others who give the best examples I can find of this attitude in Scripture. They were humble maidservants of the Lord, a title that deserves much more honor that it receives.

*<https://www.centerchurchonthegreen.org/history/crypt/>

* * <https://www.military.com/veteran-jobs/5-qualities-of-servant-leadership-and-leading-servant-heart.html>