

Pouring Out One's Soul ~ November 15, 2009
I Samuel 1:4-20; Hebrews 10:11-25; Mark 13:1-8; Psalm 16

As many of you know, I attended an ordination in West Groton, Massachusetts last week. It was held at Christian Union Church. The young woman being ordained was Jamie Green.

In our tradition, when an ordination takes place, the candidate presents a paper at a vicinage council. A vicinage council is a gathering of churches in the vicinity of the ordaining church. Each attending church has the opportunity to question the person being ordained to determine if they are fit for ministry and if all their papers are in order. Each church has one vote in affirming, or not, the ordaining church's decision to ordain the person. The vicinage council is a formality—a church may proceed to ordination even if the council votes not to affirm it in its decision.

The paper presented at a vicinage council is made up of two parts. The first is a statement of a person's faith journey and the second is a statement of the person's theology and understanding of Christian concepts.

In Jamie's statement of her faith journey, she poured out her soul as she recalled a childhood that was far less than perfect. It was an exceptionally difficult time for her. I have been to many vicinage councils in the past thirty years or so and no one has ever revealed so much about him or her self as Jamie did. She invited us to travel back in time and space and to journey forward with her.

She told us that at the age of seven she went to a church in Beloit, Wisconsin with another family and found a church that was willing to accept and love her. At the age of nine she asked the pastor there if she could be baptized. He went to talk to her family and discovered what this child was up against. Her parents told him, in effect, "Sure, whatever she wants." So, she was baptized in the center of her church family—her own was not present. She lived for the church and its youth group. Cindy Bacon, who was with us last week, was the youth advisor at the church at the time and she took Jamie under her wing.

Jamie struggled with life--always being told she didn't quite measure up to what she should be in her family of origin. While this affected her, it did not destroy her. She did not allow her family to fence her in. Instead, she took hold of life and moved forward without their help. She excelled in school to the point of earning a full academic scholarship to Northwestern University and later to Harvard Divinity School. Jamie is 26 years old and is intent on continuing to excel in all she does for her congregation and for God.

Many times in her young life, Jamie, like Hannah, had poured out her soul to God and had not been disappointed. God always answered her in one way or another with blessings too many to count.

Hannah, we are told, desperately wanted to bear a son. Her husband's other wife had children and she would provoke Hannah about being barren. In that day and age, if a woman was childless it was a sign that she was out of favor with God. So, Hannah prayed often that God would allow her to have a male child. She promised that she would

dedicate her child to the service of God in the temple, if God would only grant her deepest desire. She poured out her soul and went home sensing that God had heard her and that things would work out for her. They did, in time, and Samuel was born to her and her husband.

There are times in our lives when we, who believe, find ourselves pouring out our souls to God. We may wonder where we have gone wrong in relationships, why we have an illness or disease, why we have lost a job, why we are a little off balance, why we have failed with our children, why our life is not more fulfilling, or any number of things. It helps us to talk to God on these occasions. We find a measure of relief. This doesn't mean that our problems are solved in an instant. But, it seems that we gain important perspectives on who we are and where we are in life when we can hand our problems to God, take a step or two back, get a good night's sleep and wake to a new day and new solutions. This works for me in some way or another and I know it works for many of you. When we are caught up too much in the world, we lose the ability to see with clarity things that are going on around us. We tend to misjudge others and ourselves. We begin to accentuate the negative and simply pull ourselves deeper and deeper into worry and, sometimes, even despair.

When we can "let go and let God" for a while and feel we do not have to be in total control and direct everyone around us, we discover new vistas opening before us and we find blessed relief. Being able to "live and let live" is a tremendous gift.

This was a gift Hannah discovered after she had poured out her soul to God. She placed her future in God's hands and patiently waited for a positive outcome.

Jesus always reminds us that we need to do the same. He told us that we are so treasured by God that even the hairs on our heads are numbered. He told us not to be anxious for tomorrow for today has problems enough. He told us that it is not our place to judge or condemn anyone else, unless we want to face the same judgment and condemnation. He told us there were two requirements of us: to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbor as our self. He reminded us that the thing we most need to do is to discern the will of God for our lives and then to live it.

Sitting in a room with a young woman who had worked to discern the will of God for her life last week, renewed within me what it is I must continually seek to do. I was reminded that no matter how dark life may seem to be at times, there is always another chance when comes the dawn. There is a way for those who have the courage to live the lives we are called to live, by our faith, to find deep within the spirit that moves us and calls us forward into new chapters in life. It calls us to venture forth, pouring out our souls to God and then to wait for the answers to come, leading us onward on our journey of adventure and promise.

God is always "closer than breathing and nearer than hands and feet." God is always here waiting for us.

-- Amen