Here I Am

Vienna Presbyterian Church
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I Samuel 3:1-10

November 9, 2014
As we go further into The Story, the wonderful story of God’s presence, power and renewing work in the lives of God’s people we find in the Bible, we are encountering some exceptionally fascinating people. Today, we meet the prophet Samuel and the first king of Israel, Saul. Sometimes we talk about how life is messy. It certainly had its messy moments in the lives of these two people.

Our scripture is I Samuel 3:1-10, where we discover the marvelous way our Lord called the boy Samuel to serve Him. The story of the faithfulness of Samuel’s mother, Hannah, is one of the great and tender stories in the Bible. I remember talking with you about the calling of Samuel some five years ago because Samuel’s response to God’s call with the words, “Here I am,” is so compelling, powerful, life-changing and life-giving that it’s incredible. So it is wonderful that we encounter it again, today, in The Story. The Hebrew word Samuel used when saying, “Here I am,” is “hineni,” pronounced hin-nai-ni. When God called Abraham to ask him to take Isaac to Mt Moriah, Abraham replied, “Hinnainee – here I am.”1 It simply means, “I am available to do your bidding.” What may I do for you? Your word is my command. How may I serve you today?

Jewish singer Linda Hirshhorn explains hinnainee further when she says, “Many of you may have had the experience of hanging out with someone, maybe your kids: You're having lunch with them, and in the middle of your conversation they answer their cell phones, or they receive a text they have to answer, or maybe even they send out a tweet saying ‘Hey everybody, what's up? I'm here having lunch with my mom [or dad].’ So they're ‘here’, but not completely [here]. They're physically present—but they're not hinnainee, not ‘Here’ with a capital H. Hinnainee is about the attitude and bearing of the entire person—their emotional and spiritual presence.2” “Here I am,” means all of me is here available to serve you.

Now, I would like you to be able to remember this word hinnainee, here I am, so I would like to ask you to repeat out loud three times with me out loud: “hinnainee – here I am,” “hinnainee – here I am,” “hinnainee – here I am.” When hinnainee is used in The Story, in the Bible, it always

1 While the Hebrew word is “hineni” I will use an English pronunciation, “hinnainee.”
2 http://www.lindahirschhorn.com/writings/hineni.html
marks a life-changing moment for someone. Consider these life-changing moments as recorded across the history of God’s Big Story:

God called to Abraham and he replied, “Hinnainee - Here I am, Lord” (Genesis 22:1). God called Jacob and he replied, “Hinnainee - Here I am, Lord” (Genesis 31:11). God called Moses and he replied, “Hinnainee - Here I am, Lord” (Exodus 3:4). God asked of Isaiah, “Whom shall I send?” he replied, “Hinnainee - Here I am, send me!” (Isaiah 6:8). After the angel Gabriel spoke to Mary, she replied, “Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Luke 1:38).

Do you begin to get the idea that hinnainee is a really big deal to God and to God’s people? There is no snark in hinnainee (snark is the comment made with sarcasm or irreverence, often with downcast face and raised eyebrow). Want me to take out the trash? Want me to do jury duty? Want me to stay up all night with a sick child? In each case, the reply with snark includes folded arms, a frowning face and a downbeat, poutish “here I am.” That kind of “here I am” is actually “here I am – not.’ It’s the hinnai-no and not the hinnainee. Need me to drop by the grocery? “Here I am,” said warmly. You’re asking me to rake the leaves? “Here I am,” said graciously. Want me to lead a group at church or make a generous offering or serve on a board? “Here I am,” said confidently. Send me! I will do it with all of the grace and excellence I am capable of! Hinnainee!

So when it comes to the call of God on your life, ask yourself this challenging question: “Am I a hinnainee person or a hinnai-no person?” The ultimate hinnainee questions are, “Do you trust in Jesus Christ and desire to follow him?” “Hinnainee,” means, “Yes, Lord, here I am, trusting you and willing to serve you.” Another exceptionally significant hinnainee question is, “Are you willing to go anywhere, do anything, at any time, at any personal expense or effort to yourself if Jesus asks you to go and to do? This gets at the question of who is the Lord of your life. And if you are feeling uncertain about such an encompassing level of a hinnainee question, you might find the suggestion of Sam Shoemaker to be helpful: “Give as much of yourself as you can to as much of God as you understand.” Hinnainee, Lord! “Here I am, Lord!”

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So God called the boy Samuel three times, “Samuel, Samuel, Samuel,” and three times Samuel thought the priest Eli was calling him and he replies three times, “Hinnainee, here I am.” Eli taught him to say, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening,” and Samuel went on to be the great servant of the Lord his mother Hannah prayed he would be. Time passed and the nation of Israel began to clamor for a king so they could be like all of the tribes around them. Samuel repeatedly told them that God was their king but the people refused to listen and, finally, God told Samuel to anoint a young man by the name of Saul to be the first King of Israel.

Almost from the start, we discover that Saul’s attitude in life was virtually the opposite of hinnainee. For Saul, it was always about hinnai-ME! Here I am—for me! My grandfather used to talk about people who are, “Look-a-me’s” whose whole life is simply, “It’s all about me and the wonderfulness of me.” If hinnainee to our God is to go anywhere, at any time, at any personal expense in service of our Lord, then for Saul it was to go anywhere, any time for himself. In fact, in three episodes we see that out of simple fear we discover his practice of turning his hinnainee moments into hinnai-no moments.

In the first episode, in a private meeting, Samuel anointed Saul to be the first king over Israel and explained that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon Saul. Then Samuel summoned the whole people of Israel together and out of the crowd he publically named Saul to be the new king, but Saul was nowhere to be found. He was hiding in the baggage. Simple fear changed the hinnainee Saul could have offered to God and to the Israelites into a hinnai-no. Nevertheless, he was brought out and they proclaimed him king.

Sometime later, the Philistines assembled to fight Israel with six thousand chariots and a huge army. The Israeliite soldiers began to gather around Saul, and Samuel had told Saul to wait for him to make an offering to the Lord. However, Saul’s men were terrified of the Philistines and began to scatter. Samuel hadn’t shown up, and Saul, out of simple fear, saw he was losing his troops, made the offering to the Lord himself. Samuel rebuke him and tells him that because he did not have a heart to trust God that a new leader would arise. Again, fear drove Saul to hinnai-no and not to hinnainee.
Finally, God told Samuel that the tribe of the Amalekites was to be punished: that Saul was to attack them and leave nothing living, neither human nor animal. However, Saul and his army spared Agag, the king of the Amalekites, and the best of his sheep and cattle. Then God’s Big Story tells us two things happened. First, after the battle, Saul set up a monument to himself and to his own honor. Pure hinnai-ME—pure look-a-me. For Saul, it was always about himself. Second, Samuel finds him and Saul says, “I have carried out the Lord’s instructions”—a complete lie. Remember, God’s command was not to leave a living creature in Agag’s kingdom, to which Samuel replies, “What, then, is the bleating of sheep in my ears? Clearly, Saul had not obeyed God. Saul explains to Samuel that he didn’t kill every living thing because, “I was afraid of the people and I gave in to them.” His soldiers wanted the animals for themselves. No hinnainee here. Pure hinnai-no again, out of fear!

Three times Saul was asked to do something by God, and three times, out of simple fear, his response was hinnai-no instead of hinnainee. There will be times when you have the opportunity to serve your God, your wife, your husband, your child, your employer, your government and simple fear will arise. We all get that. We all get that you will want to say hinnai-NO! You have this choice: hinnai-no out of fear, or trust God, take courage and hinnainee—Yes, Lord here I am. Send me!

What I appreciate about hinnainee is that it applies to all aspects of our daily lives. I have a friend in Charlotte whose grandchildren could no longer be cared for by their parents. So he and his wife, in their upper sixties, have taken four children under the age of ten into their home to raise them. Hinnainee. When the Ebola crisis erupted, countless medical workers put themselves in harm’s way to help. Hinnainee. The moving story during the Bengals-Browns football game Thursday night was Devon Still’s daughter Leah who has stage four cancer. As a player, Devon would have been cut from the Bengals team but they kept him on the practice squad so Leah would be covered by insurance, and countless people have responded by giving generously to Children’s Hospitals. So many stories of people in that situation saying, “Hinnainee—here I am.”

On November 23, in just two weeks, we are going to be celebrating “Vision 2015” here at VPC. It will be a day for us to appreciate all that our Lord has done for us. For you and for me personally and for our congregation, we know the
incredible blessing of the God who says to us, “Hinnainee—here I am—for you.” On that Vision Day, Pastor Pete will paint us a picture of our future and we will all look forward to the wonderful ways in which our Lord is leading us.

We will also have the opportunity to pledge our financial generosity to support our congregation’s ministry in the year to come. I remember Dick Halverson, former Chaplain of the US Senate, once talking about this matter of generosity (what in essence was a hinnainee moment for us who are active participants here at VPC). Dick suggested you and I begin at ground zero. Instead of starting with a preconceived notion as to what to give, start with a prayer: “In all humility, Lord, I ask you to reveal to me what you want to do through me.” In essence, it is a prayer of hinnainee. Then Dick said:

- Pray for the faith to follow God’s leading—that your heart will be right.
- Pray that God will put on your heart an amount you will give—an amount you will trust God for—an amount greater than you can give easily.
- Pray daily that God will provide that amount.
- Give against that amount, expecting God to provide it and to meet your needs.

All of this, of course, in the true spirit of hinnainee—here I am.

Some years ago, Robertson McQuilkin was president of Columbia International University.3 His grandfather had founded the university, his father had been president and finally Robertson became president. In the midst of great accomplishments, his wife, Muriel, was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s. She lost her memory quickly. So Robertson decided to resign as president so he could spend full-time taking care of his wife. People came to him and said things to him like, “What difference does it make? Your wife doesn’t know who you are. Anybody could take care of her. You are setting aside your incredible gifts to take up a role anybody could fill—she doesn’t even know it’s you. You are going back on your calling.” Robertson replied, “She does not know who she is but I know who she is,” and “A calling of God involves promise. I made a promise

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3 I am indebted to Tony Campolo from whom I heard this story.
and I will be true to my word.” Robertson did resign. Read these marvelous words of his resignation speech:

“I haven’t, in my life, experienced easy decision-making on major decisions. But one of the simplest and clearest decisions I’ve had to make is this one, because circumstances dictated it. Muriel, now in the last couple of months, seems to be almost happy when with me, and almost never happy when not with me. In fact, she seems to feel trapped, becomes very fearful, sometimes almost terror, and when she can’t get to me, there can be anger; she’s in distress. But when I am with her, she's happy and contented. And, so, I must be with her at all times. And you see, it’s not only that I promised “in sickness and in health, ’til death do us part,” and I am a man of my word, but as I have said, I don’t know with this group, but I have said publicly, it’s the only fair thing. She sacrificed for me for forty years, to make my life possible. So, if I cared for her for forty years, I would still be in debt. However, there is much more. It’s not that I have to, it’s that I get to. I love her very dearly, and you can tell it’s not easy to talk about. She is a delight. It’s a great honor to care for such a wonderful person.”

Did you hear that? “It’s not that I have to, it’s that I get to.” While there is much in Robertson’s remarks that have to do with real love, there is something else here, something more here. Everything about his words shouts hinnenai—hinnenai is not a have to. Hinnenai is a get to. Here I am. Are you suffering? Here I am. Do you require a major effort on my part? Here I am. Do you need money to fulfill your mission? Here I am. Do you require more of my time than I have to give? Here I am. Hinnenai is not a have to. It’s a get to.

“O Lord, hinnenai, here I am. Here we are—willing to go anywhere, do anything at whatever personal expense and whatever personal effort on our part to serve you, to serve a husband, a wife, a child, a grandchild, a friend, a neighbor, an employer, a fellow human being. Here I am, Lord. How may we serve you?”

To listen to Robertson McQuilkin’s Resignation Speech simply type those words into Youtube or check out: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MqtG-XfxMC4

For a wonderful song about hineni (hinnenai) type “Here I Am Raquel Gershon Max Jared” into Youtube or check out: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msL0ywAiviM

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