

# **When God Said, “Hineni!”** (#5 in the “*Only This and Nothing More?*” Lenten series)

*Then your light will break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing will spring up speedily . . .  
Then you will call, and ADONAI will answer.  
You will cry and He will say, “Here I am” (Hineni!)  
(Isaiah 58:8-9a – Tree of Life Version)*

*Here I am (Hineni!), doing a new thing;  
Now it is springing up— do you not know about it?  
I will surely make a way in the desert,  
rivers in the wasteland.  
(Isaiah 43:19 – Tree of Life Version)*

A sermon by Siegfried S. Johnson on the Fifth Sunday in Lent, **March 18, 2018**  
(Volume 1 Number 35)

Christ of the Hills UMC, 700 Balearic Drive, Hot Springs Village, Arkansas 71909

As today we conclude a five message Lenten series I’ve called “*Only This and Nothing More?*” I want to begin by telling you how much I like bookends. In literary terminology such bookends are known as chiasms, matching beginning to end and thus creating a frame to bring the entire corpus into sharp focus. A very clear example demonstrating this structural mechanism of literary framing is one I’ve used in my Tuesday class, the book of Lamentations with five chapters, all but the third chapter having 22 verses. The middle chapter triples that with 66 verses. These chapters are acrostics using the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, with the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter – right in the middle – tripling the acrostic so that vv. 1-3 begin with Aleph (A), vv. 4-6 begin with Beth (B), etc. Lamentations is an example of framing, great literary aerobics.

I share this in order for you better to understand the frame I am creating with this final message of the series, something at the end of the series that will match the beginning and tie it all together. My first message was built around the two times in the Hebrew Bible when the precisely same Hebrew question was asked – *Mah enosh? What is man?* – with two very different answers from precisely opposite perspectives, the psalmist (Psalm 8) lifting his eyes to the heavens in wonder at humankind’s lofty place in the created order, and Job (Job 7) lowering his eyes to the earth in sorrow at humankind’s dust-to-dust journey from cradle to grave.

Our journey through Lent began with Job’s perspective, the ashes of Ash Wednesday greeting us with the liturgical formula, “*Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*” And so we proceed through the forty days of Lent, all the way to Good Friday and its cold tomb.

Job's perspective, Lent's perspective, is undeniable. Yes, but are we *Only this and Nothing More*? Lent soon ending, Easter will shout back across those forty days to Ash Wednesday to declare that we are NOT *Only This and Nothing More*.

Now, as in the first message we considered a Hebrew question spoken twice, in order to create a frame in this last message of the series I again offer you a Hebrew affirmation – *Hineni* (Hebrew = “*Here I Am*”) – used in two very unique settings.

To be sure, the word *Hineni* itself is hardly unusual, used many times in the Hebrew Bible, both by luminaries like Abraham, Moses, and Isaiah, but also by many others whose names we would not so immediately recognize

*Hineni* is more emphatic than the normal word meaning, simply, “Here.” To say *Poh* (Hebrew = “*Here*”) is more matter-of-fact and less expressive of deep readiness. Calling roll in class, for example, children would normally answer “*Poh*” as an affirmation of physical presence.

*Hineni* conveys more than physical presence. It conveys a volitional, emotional, fully engaged presence. When God called to Abraham to journey to the Promised Land, and later to take his son Isaac to Mt Moriah, Abram didn't answer with “*Poh*,” but with *Hineni*!

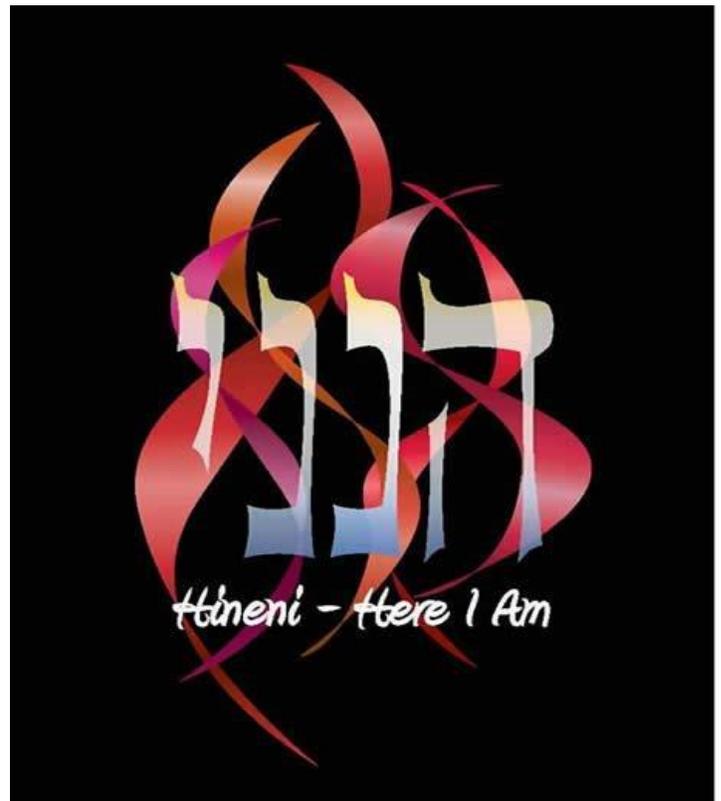
When Moses saw the burning bush and, fearfully approaching it heard “*Moses, Moses*,” he answered not with “*Poh*” but with *Hineni*.

When Isaiah, in the year that King Uzziah died, saw the Lord high and lifted up and heard that seraphim crying “*Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God of Hosts!*” and heard a voice say, “*Whom shall I send?*” he answered, not with “*Poh*” but with *Hineni*.

So here is a frame for you, tying this series into a package. As we began with *Mah Enosh* twice asked, we end with *Hineni* twice spoken.

Twice spoken, that is, by God. Only two times in the Hebrew Bible does God say *Hineni* (Here I am!), and both are in Isaiah.

Ah, but what is a frame without something to frame? So let's revisit and perhaps make sense of our progression these past five Sundays. If the 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> messages are a frame, the middle three have taken us on a journey.



In the second sermon, “*A Gigantic Genetic Family Reunion*,” we considered who we are by *Nature*, by the *Chance* of who are parents are bequeathing to us our genetic make-up. We remembered how King David confessed in Psalm 51 that he was conceived and born a sinner. We traced our genetic stew through 21 generations and saw that there would be in those 700 years some 2,000,000 ancestors cavorting in our chromosomes.

*Who am I?* I am what I born to be. It’s in the genes.

In the third sermon we moved from *Nature* to *Nurture*, from *Chance* to *Circumstance*. I offered you an image of the scaffolding wrapping the façade of the iconic St. Patrick’s Cathedral in Manhattan (which I visited last month). We talked about how a human life, to use the words of Emily Dickinson, is “*a past of plank and nail, and slowness -- til the scaffolds drop, affirming it . . . a soul.*”

*Who am I?* Not only what I am by *Nature* and *Chance* combination of my genetics, but I am what I have become through the scaffolding around me, the *Nurture* and *Circumstance* of parents, teachers, mentors, society,.

In the fourth sermon, “*Yea, though I Walk*,” we walked under and through the scaffolding into the heart of the temple, remembering that our journey, our pilgrimage through life, is a personal walk, that our *Choices* make a difference in our *Becoming*.

*Who am I?* Beyond the *Nature* and *Chance* of the DNA of my genetic make-up, and beyond the *Nurture* and *Circumstance* surrounding me, I am what I have become through my own *Choices* and consequences of those choices.

*Who am I?* What I am by the *Chance* of *Nature*. What I am by the *Circumstance* of *Nurture*. And what I have become by *Choice* and *Consequences*.

That says a great deal. Yet, still I ask. Am I *Only This and Nothing More*? What if my genetic code is lacking? What if nurture fails me and the scaffolding is weak? What if I have chosen poorly? Even then. Even then, I am NOT *Only This and Nothing More*!

This is the moment God shows up and says, *Hineni* (Here I am!)

*Then your light will break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing will spring up speedily . . .  
Then you will call, and ADONAI will answer.  
You will cry and He will say, “Here I am” (Hineni!)  
(Isaiah 58:8-9a – Tree of Life Version)*

*Here I am (Hineni!), doing a new thing;  
Now it is springing up— do you not know about it?*

*I will surely make a way in the desert,  
rivers in the wasteland.*

(Isaiah 43:19 – Tree of Life Version)

God's involvement in our salvation is Paul's theme in Romans 8, an affirmation that "*all things work together for good for those who love the Lord and are called according to his purpose.*" Paul sees the beloved of God being destined for conformity to Jesus Christ, saying, "*If God be for us, who can be against us?*"

I see God in Romans 8 saying, *Hineni*. "*If Nature has failed you, if Nurture has cheated you, if your own choices have diminished you, I am there to conform you to the image of my Son. You are NOT Only This and Nothing More!*"

Since God has said *Hineni!* to us, let's sing our own *Hineni* with the beautiful hymn, "*Here I Am, Lord.*"

הנני  
(Hineni)



Here I am!