

“Speak, LORD!”
1 Samuel 3:1-20
Sermon #85
2nd Sunday After the Epiphany
45th Sunday in the COVID-19 Pandemic
1.17.21

1 Samuel 3:1-20 CEB

3 Now the boy Samuel was serving the Lord under Eli. The Lord’s word was rare at that time, and visions weren’t widely known. **2**

One day Eli, whose eyes had grown so weak he was unable to see, was lying down in his room.**3** God’s lamp hadn’t gone out yet, and Samuel was lying down in the Lord’s temple, where God’s chest was.

4 The Lord called to Samuel. “I’m here,” he said.

5 Samuel hurried to Eli and said, “I’m here. You called me?”

“I didn’t call you,” Eli replied. “Go lie down.” So he did.

6 Again the Lord called Samuel, so Samuel got up, went to Eli, and said, “I’m here. You called me?”

“I didn’t call, my son,” Eli replied. “Go and lie down.”

(**7** Now Samuel didn’t yet know the Lord, and the Lord’s word hadn’t yet been revealed to him.)

8 A third time the Lord called Samuel. He got up, went to Eli, and said, “I’m here. You called me?”

Then Eli realized that it was the Lord who was calling the boy. **9** So Eli said to Samuel, “Go and lie down. If he calls you, say, ‘Speak, Lord. Your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down where he’d been.

10 Then the Lord came and stood there, calling just as before, “Samuel, Samuel!”

Samuel said, “Speak. Your servant is listening.”

11 The Lord said to Samuel, “I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of all who hear it tingle! **12** On that day, I will bring to pass against Eli everything I said about his household—every last bit of it! **13** I told him that I would punish his family forever because of the wrongdoing he knew about—how his sons were cursing God, but he wouldn’t stop them. **14** Because of that I swore about Eli’s household that his family’s wrongdoing will never be reconciled by sacrifice or by offering.”

15 Samuel lay there until morning, then opened the doors of the Lord’s house. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. **16** But Eli called Samuel, saying: “Samuel, my son!”

“I’m here,” Samuel said.

17 “What did he say to you?” Eli asked. “Don’t hide anything from me. May God deal harshly with you and worse still if you hide from

me a single word from everything he said to you.” **18** So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him.

“He is the Lord, ” Eli said. “He will do as he pleases.”

19 So Samuel grew up, and the Lord was with him, not allowing any of his words to fail. **20** All Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was trustworthy as the Lord’s prophet.

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

It was about 20 years ago on a summer day in Tennessee. I'm at home with my mom, and as you know, the mosquitos are in ample supply during the summer. And, of course, I've gotten bitten by mosquitos and am in need of itch cream. I knew at one point we had some of the brand name of cortisone cream called Cortaid. But, to my dismay, what we had at one point I thought could cure my problems was, you guessed it, not there. We were out of Cortaid.

I found Mom in the den and I said: "Mom, we need some Cortaid." "What?", she asked. "Mom, we need some Cortaid." "What?!?", she responded with disgust! Teenaged T. Wes was not happy.

Louder and slower I exclaimed: "Mom!! We. Need. Some. Cortaid."

I thought, surely she'll understand why I'm crying out for help! It's the summer and my health and well-being rests in this moment! If she, my mother, who has a driver's license, cannot help me in my hour of need, I will surely perish from these bites!

And then I heard those dreaded words: "Koolaid? Why can't you drink water like everyone else?!?!?!?!?"

"MOM!!! NO!!!! CORTAID!"

And she looked at me. And I threw my hands up in disgust and ran into the inner sanctum, the place that I and I alone could find refuge from the chaos: My room.

Several minutes later, I heard my mother laughing. Turns out, she finally understood what I needed, not what she thought I said. I didn't laugh. But, some time after that and until she died several years later, that was probably the funniest moment in our relationship and we would still bring it up occasionally. And we'd laugh about it.

Imagine being Samuel. Not being understood! You KNOW you heard a voice. You tell someone and they ignore you. Or maybe you feel strongly about something or someone and people brush you off because of your age or gender saying: "You're imagining things", "That didn't really happen", or "That person isn't really like that at all." Yet, you know what the truth is. You know what really happened or you've seen someone for who they really are.

Whatever the situation, most of us have been the doubted and at other times, the doubter.

Samuel is a young boy and he serves in the Temple. Eli was the priest in the Temple. If you are able to recall, years earlier, Samuel had been dedicated by his mother, Hannah, to be in service of the LORD in the Temple and cared for by Eli. Yet, Eli has his own problems. His sons, who are priests, are grifters. They steal from the sacrifices dedicated Jews would offer. They also run around with as many women as they can.

No wonder the LORD's word was rare in those days and visions weren't widely known. When the priests behave like Eli's sons, it's probably safe to imagine that they aren't bothering to listen for the LORD's word or pay attention to any vision from God. And Eli the

priest isn't doing much to help the situation. Oh, and Eli is blind-physically and spiritually.

This is a pretty good recipe for disaster. All the people who are supposed to be the spiritual leaders for Israel are not doing too well.

And here is young Samuel. He's trying to sleep. Maybe he's thinking about his parents who he sees about once per year. Maybe he's not too sure about what exactly he's supposed to do. But, he's in the LORD's service and he is faithful. Honestly, he's probably more of an adult than the adults who were supposed to lead. And if you noticed in verse three, despite the lack of leadership, God is still there in the midst of the people:

God's lamp hadn't gone out yet, and Samuel was lying down in the LORD's temple, where God's chest was.

The light of God hadn't been extinguished. The Ark of God (Ark of the Covenant) that had accompanied the Hebrews for years is still right there.

God's loving presence and God's laws hadn't gone anywhere.

"Samuel! Samuel!"

Samuel knew he heard a voice. He just didn't know it was the LORD because he didn't yet know the LORD nor had he been revealed the LORD's word. Yet, for all his life, he had been in service TO the LORD.

And Eli dismissed him. "Get back to bed!"

And it happens again. Same result. Nothing. Back to bed Samuel goes.

A third time it happens. At least Eli is finally helpful because he knows Samuel is experiencing something Eli had not for some time: Hearing the voice of the LORD, which was rare in those days.

Samuel is growing up. God is speaking to this young leader. The child is now the adult and the adult is now the child. Eli and his sons, who know better, have “forfeited the word of [the LORD]”.¹ Eli, who had every chance to set his sons back on the straight and narrow, is now dependent on this young man, Samuel, to learn the LORD’s word.²

¹ Walter Brueggemann. *First and Second Samuel*. John Knox Press: Louisville, 1990, p. 25

² *ibid.*

God is doing a new thing. God is working through a new generation. God is choosing the outsider (young Samuel) over the insider (Eli and his sons). God is raising up and bringing down.

I think of this story and I think of young people who have spoken the truth and were ignored, mocked, or simply misunderstood. One story I instantly thought to connect with Samuel is Malala

Yousafzai. Born in 1997, she is Pakistani and a human rights advocate, especially for the right for girls to be educated.³ Her father, a teacher, ran a school for girls in their village.

Unfortunately, the Taliban took over the area and forbade girls from getting an education. From that point on for about three or four years, Malala continued to speak out against the injustice of children, especially females, being denied an education.

³ <https://malala.org/malalas-story>

One day in 2012, while on a bus with several other girls after school, a gunman boarded the bus and shot her. Thankfully, she recovered and continued to speak out. Before she turned 18, Malala received the Nobel Prize and is now a proud graduate of Oxford as of 2020. She still continues the work that people tried to assassinate her for.

It's not easy to hear the LORD's voice when everyone else ignores you. But, the LORD is speaking, friends. God's light hasn't been extinguished, just like in Samuel's day. God has been and still is present with us in all the muck. And God is raising up leaders.....new leaders.....leaders from all places, ages, genders, and circumstances. A generational shift is occurring. And it's time for the elders to listen and take note. Please hear me, I'm not saying that all the elders present today aren't hearing a word from the LORD nor are all people from the younger generations hearing

a word from the LORD. I am pointing out the generational shift that is occurring and it's probably unsettling for many of us right now. Think also about last week's ordination and installation. PPC's Ruling Elders on the Session are evenly split between three age brackets: Three 80+, three 60+, and three way under 60. If we are to move forward, if generations are to MENTOR each other, if we are to figure out how to begin to move into the middle of the 21st century, generational shifts have to happen and we must learn from each other. It's not only time to have the courage of Samuel to heed the LORD's word, it's also time to have the courage of Eli and to recognize that the LORD is working in new ways. It takes courage to speak the LORD's word, it also takes courage to recognize when someone else is hearing the LORD's word, even if it's someone who appears to be an outsider like Malala or Samuel.

Be encouraged. The LORD's light hasn't gone out. God is right here in the midst of us. God is still speaking a word to people we never thought possible. God is up to something. And by the love of God, the grace of Christ Jesus, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit we will be able to face the opportunities that lie ahead.

Beloved, believe this Good News!

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.