

<b>Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2018</b> <b>Cathedral, Grahamstown</b> <b>7.30 &amp; 9.30 a.m.</b>		<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost</b> <b>9<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year B</b>
1 Sam 3:1-10 (11-20)	Ps 139:1-5, 13-18	2 Corinthians 4:5-12
		Mark 2:23 – 3:6
<b>THE CALL OF GOD</b>		

“Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ And Samuel said, ‘Speak, for your servant is listening.’” (1 Sam 3:10)

“You knew my soul and my bones were not hidden from you: when I was formed in secret and woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my limbs when they were yet imperfect; and in your book were all my members written; Day by day they were fashioned: and not one was late in growing.” (Ps 139:13-16)

**Samuel**

Our Old Testament readings for the next few weeks take us through the story of the prophet Samuel and the first two kings of Israel – King Saul, followed by King David. We listen to the story as it is read to us – as if we are sitting around a fire, listening to a great story teller, telling of the great events of our time and times past.

The story invites us into the world of Samuel, Saul, David, their lives, their struggles, their failures, their walk with God. We read these ancient stories. We watch these great men and women of God. We share in their ups and downs, as they fight their battles, win victories, and as they come crashing down in defeat. Saul and his dreams and deep depression, his death in battle, David’s victory over the giant warrior Goliath, David and his adultery with Bathsheba, King Solomon his son... these are stories of human achievements; and running through these stories is the purpose and will of God, God’s call on individual lives, God’s relationship with his chosen people.

We read from the books 1 and 2 Samuel. Samuel the prophet. Yet it is the lives of the first two kings, Saul and David, that dominate these two books. David's story is the biggest, stretching from 1 Sam 16 to 2 Kings 2. And Saul's story is almost as large and even after his death, his shadow and the shadow of his house remain over the story of David.

Yet the title of the books does not remember Saul or David; instead, it remembers Samuel who anointed them.

Our reading picks up the story of Samuel several years after his birth. His mother, Hannah, had been barren and unable to have children. In despair, she comes to the house of God at Shiloh, to pray. God hears her prayer, she conceives and has a son who she names Samuel, and then, as she had promised, she brings her child to the Lord at Shiloh, to dedicate him to God and to serve him. Samuel is a child set apart so that he may serve God his whole life.

## **Eli**

The young boy Samuel is given into the care of Eli, the old priest at Shiloh. Eli is a sad figure. An old man, with two sons, also priests. They have lived with their father at the house of the Lord, grown up in the presence of the Lord, priests like their father, following in his footsteps. But these two sons are a disgrace to their calling. They are described as “scoundrels, with no regard for the Lord or for the duties of the priests to the people...they treated the offerings of the Lord with contempt... they lay with the women who served at the entrance to the tent” (1 Sam 2:12, 17, 22).

In contrast, Samuel also grows up in the presence of the Lord. He becomes a spiritual son to Eli. And sadly the first word he receives from God is a word of judgment against Eli and his family.

## **God's call to Samuel**

3:1 The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

Not the written word, but the word that inspires, transforms, brings life... a community untransformed... riddled with crime and violence... the current rash of cash in transit robberies, day light robberies, crumbling infrastructure of our town... a deep longing and hunger for the word that transforms and brings hope. For visions from God that reveal the way to us. Visions and dreams, the Spirit speaking to us and guiding us...

3:2 Eli – failing eyesight... lying down in his room.

He is in the right place, in the temple. But is his failing eye sight merely old age? Or is it also an inactive inner eye, the absence of second sight, or wisdom... has he lost the plot? Has the behaviour of his sons crushed him? Is he no longer able to give leadership and guidance? Yet he was able to hear Hannah, receive Samuel, and in a few moments he can discern that God is speaking to Samuel. So let's not be too hard on old Eli.

3:4 The divine call comes to Samuel.

God's call begins the action. It is Eli who is able to recognise what is happening. Samuel answers, and God speaks to him.

3:10 Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.'"

Finally Samuel, coached and helped by Eli, is able to hear God and respond to the call from God.

3:19 As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba

knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord ... And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.

Samuel eclipses Eli, becomes the prominent figure – in the same way, in due time, that David is to eclipse Saul and take over the kingship. In both cases, God has raised up someone to carry the message forward.

## **God's call**

Green season – life and growth, discipleship, what it means in our daily lives to follow Jesus Christ as our Lord...

The mentoring of younger people by those older in the faith... can you and I be Eli to the Samuels around us? In what ways can our younger people be encouraged?

The story of Eli and Samuel is NOT a struggle between the youth and the older generation. Samuel also grows up and grows old. Rather, it is a story of God's call and our faithful response.

In Youth month... God's call to Samuel – is God speaking to you as a young person? Are you open to hearing God's call on your life?

The call to know and love the Lord, to be used by him to speak a word, to bring hope and healing, to be a channel for his love...

The call and invitation to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ...

The call of God into ministry and service and witness: the call to have schools that are safe places for our children, where they can grow and learn and nurtured; families where parents love one another and care for their children; communities where children grow up protected and safe, not abandoned or neglected or abused; a functional municipality.

And, in the bigger picture, the call of God to economic transformation, the use of land – particularly as our country engages with land expropriation without compensation; adequate housing for all; poor communities that are struggling; comfort and poverty side by side in our towns...God's call to us.

It is the call of God into a life of worship.

We long for prophets who will speak the word of God within the life of the church, and in the life of our nation.... We thank God for the ministry and witness of Archbishop Thabo in this regard, and the South African Council of Churches. Speaking truth to power.

There is also the danger of false prophets, wolves in sheep's clothing, who fly around in their private aeroplanes, who live lives of luxury and wealth, who promise healing and miracles and wealth for those who follow them, who say that prosperity is a sign of God's call – let's not be taken in or deceived by their false teaching and false message. These false prophets are not sent by God. The Seven Angels church... others who claim to have a word from God, but are simply building their own kingdom, not the kingdom of God.

We follow the Lord and Master who came to wash our feet, who calls us to serve one another, to calls us to wash one another's feet. The servant leader. The suffering servant.

Here I weave in Ps 139. The value of each one of us, in God's eyes. No mistakes. A child might be born unwanted or even discarded. But in the sight of God, you or I are not a mistake. Nothing that cannot be restored or redeemed. Our value and worth in the sight of God is infinite. Many in our community have dreadful experiences of trauma and violence. Yet each of us, each one of you, is precious in the sight of God. You are worthy to hear God's call on your life.

## **CONCLUSION**

Let us be open to hearing the call of God – and let us respond!

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