
Joining the Family of God

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 14 January 2024

1 Samuel 3:1-20 • 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 • John 1:43-51



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

We've got a great story from the First Book of Samuel this morning — one of my all-time favourites. It is about the boy Samuel and the first time that God spoke to him. We may imagine that Samuel was at the time maybe 12 or 13? He lived at the temple with the priest Eli and assisted him in serving the Lord. Eli was getting very old and was nearly blind, so Samuel would have been a big help to him. I expect Eli used Samuel's help a lot to carry vessels, help with sacrifices, go on various errands, all that sort of thing. Samuel would have been kept very busy. And it was important work, for everything they did in the temple was according to the Lord's commands, as the people had received them through Moses.

The Lord surely spoke to the priest Eli, for he was a godly man and had served the Lord for many years. But we are told that there were not many visions in those days. It wasn't like the days of Moses, when God spoke to the Israelites in the desert, or to Abraham or Jacob or any of the other prophets and servants of God. How amazing to have lived in those times, when people frequently had

visions or dreams in which God spoke to them! Still, God must have used other means to communicate with his people, perhaps more as he does these days.

But in our story today, Samuel is awoken by a voice calling him: “Samuel! Samuel!” He wakes up, and immediately assumes that it’s Eli calling him, for the Lord had not spoken to him before; and the only person he regularly spoke to, I expect, was Eli. But Eli denies having spoken. This happens three times, and finally Eli figures it out, and tells Samuel that it is the Lord calling him.

Now, how remarkable this is! Why is God speaking to this boy, this insignificant servant of Eli’s? Surely God would speak to the priest, Eli himself, if there was anything of importance to impart! But God chooses to reveal himself, as a voice at least, to the boy instead. And the reason soon becomes clear: God wants to tell Samuel something about Eli and Eli’s family.

But let us pause for a moment, for this story really isn’t about Eli, or the condemnation God brings on him and his family. It’s about the boy Samuel. This is God’s first direct communication to Samuel, but it won’t be the last. For Samuel is ordained by God to be a great prophet to his people. It was Samuel who anointed Saul as king over the Israelites when they rebelled against God’s authority and demanded a king. It was Samuel who anointed God’s new choice for king, David, and David became the great king and ancestor of Jesus Christ. God marked out Samuel from early on to become a great instrument of God’s will.

And God frequently makes what seem to be unusual choices in people to serve him. Who else might we think of? How about David? The greatest king in Jewish and Christian history was King David, who was chosen to be God’s servant when only a shepherd boy. How fitting that Samuel, whom God chose as a boy, should be the one to anoint David, also chosen as a boy! And another young person, Mary of Bethlehem, also was chosen for a great service: becoming the mother of our Lord Jesus.

It is in light of this history that we think about baptism. For baptism is a kind of choice, also — God’s choice. And when the one to be baptised is a child or a baby, we see the same pattern.

Today, we have baptised a little girl into the family of God. And who knows whether she will turn out to be as great as Samuel, as famous as King David? What does God have in mind for this child? The parents have brought the child to be baptised, making the first, initial choice for the baby, who is too young still to make it herself. They are saying to God: here is our precious baby, whom we will teach to love you as we do. And all of us in the congregation make that promise too. God reciprocates, as God always does, with love and care for the child. Whatever this child becomes, whatever she does as a youth

and an adult, she will have the love of God. And if she continues in faith, she may well become a treasured servant of God, just as Samuel and David did.

And so we give thanks — for Samuel, for David, for Mary, and for our newly baptised little girl, who are all part of the family we all belong to, the family of God. May God bless her and all her family, today and forever. Amen.