

1 Samuel 3:1-20

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

St. John 1:43-51

1 Samuel 3:1-20

¹Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

²At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. ⁴Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" ⁵and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. ⁶The LORD called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." ⁷Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." ¹¹Then the LORD said to Samuel, "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle. ¹²On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. ¹³For I have told him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. ¹⁴Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering forever."

¹⁵Samuel lay there until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. ¹⁶But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." He said, "Here I am." ¹⁷Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also, if you hide anything from me of all that he told you." ¹⁸So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. Then he said, "It is the LORD; let him do what seems good to him."

¹⁹As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. ²⁰And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the LORD.

The Old Testament lesson records one of the great stories of the Bible. It is a story about the eminent prophet Samuel when he was a little boy. We like stories about our heroes when they were little kids. The story of Jesus when he was twelve years old is always popular. In this society we like to hear about George Washington as a little fellow with a hatchet. It's always interesting to think about great people when they were children.

Samuel had been given to the service of God. His mother Hannah had prayed for a child and promised God that if he would give her a child she would dedicate him to the service of God. She had Samuel. So Hannah took him when he was a little baby and turned him over to the old man, Eli, who had lived in the temple at Shiloh for a long time. Some years passed, but

not that many. The boy, Samuel, was asleep in the room where they kept the Ark of the Covenant. Eli was asleep in another room. The Lord called, "Samuel". Samuel was a good boy; he jumped up right away and went to Eli. He said, "Here I am. You called me." Eli said, "No, I didn't call you. Go back to sleep." It happened again. Samuel ran to Eli and said, "Here I am. Why did you call?" Eli told him to go back to sleep. A third time the Lord called, and a third time Samuel answered - **but he answered the wrong person** - because he thought **Eli** was calling. This time Eli realized it was **the Lord** calling, and he told the boy what to do. "Go back to bed. Next time you hear the call say, 'Speak, Lord; your servant is listening'." So, Samuel did.

I don't know if this is a story about Eli or a story about Samuel.

We have a lot we could learn from either of the two characters. We have all found ourselves in both positions. I don't mean age. That's the obvious difference between Samuel and Eli. Samuel was a child and Eli was very old. But we have all found ourselves in the position of these two **when God comes to speak**.

We have found ourselves in the position of young Samuel - hopeful and eager and willing, **but confused**.

We have found ourselves as Eli - experienced, wise, **but getting blind**.

Of course we have the most to learn from the third character in this story - God. But that's always true and we don't find ourselves in the position of God.

The **circumstances** are familiar. The Scripture reads: "The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread." If we think about God's activity in the world at all, we often think of it in those terms. Why doesn't God come around any more? You never hear about God the way they did in the old days.

But, Eli was faithful. Not exciting, perhaps, but faithful. He was a man who had given himself good habits. He disciplined himself and put himself where he should be. He lived in the temple; he did what he was supposed to do.

And so with us. Even when we shake our heads because we don't think God is active enough, we still remain faithful. We try to give ourselves good habits. Put ourselves where we should be and do what we should do.

And over the years our vision dims a bit. And we don't always have a vision of God, but we cling to our faith and our good habits. And that is where we place our trust. ... And when a fresh voice comes running in on young feet and shouts a response before we are ready to wake up we automatically respond like Eli did. "I didn't call you; go lie down."

I didn't call you.

It's hard to remember that a response might not be a response to **our** call. **It might be a response to God's call.** A response to a new message that didn't come from us. We, the people of good habits, and faithful disciplines, who are right here in the temple.

Those are all good things to be - the very best that we can do. But it is the **Lord** who calls. When we understand that the **Lord** called the child...we will instruct the child to listen.

Those are the real messages - the messages from God. Our good habits, and faith, and discipline...Our attendance at church and daily living for God are the best things **we** can do. **But they must never be confused with what God does.** Often they are. We all know how easy it is to say, "Look, I am a good person. I accomplish all sorts of good things. Listen to **me** and the Kingdom will come."

Our message to the world must not be "Listen to what **I** can tell you." Our message to the world is "Listen to what **God** has to say." Our message to the world is "World! Lie still and say 'Speak Lord, your servant hears'."

The lesson we can learn from Eli is important. Just because **we** do not call is no reason to say, "You have no business being up disturbing the temple. Go back to sleep."

Real calls come from God.

And there is a lesson to be learned from Samuel. We have also found ourselves in Samuel's position. Can't you think of times when you have heard a call...you want to accomplish something. Something good **but you are not clear what it is**. You've heard something, but you can't quite put your finger on it. Nevertheless – you have responded. You haven't pulled the covers over your head, you have responded quickly, eagerly, ... and you've been told, "Go lie down. Go to sleep."

It's frustrating. When a call comes we want to answer. We must answer. Samuel answered - but he was frustrated.

Samuel was frustrated for the same reason we are frustrated. God called, **and Samuel responded to someone else**. He did not respond to God.

We look to other places, other people, and we are frustrated. We can always be disappointed if we give our response to any other than God. We can put our faith in people who seem strong, in people who claim to know the answers. We can put our faith in the things that seem easiest - security, comfort, approval. Most often we put our faith in ourselves, our decisions, the way we have already made up our minds.

We hear a call, we see a need, but we go running off in the wrong direction. We try answers that we've used before, even if they are wrong. We trust ourselves even if we are too weak.

And we will be frustrated. We will keep looking earnestly for a way to respond to the call of God. But we will be frustrated because we are choosing where to go to respond.

There is the lesson to learn from Samuel: When God calls your name - say, "Speak, Lord, your servant hears". Let God tell **you** what he wants. Let God tell **you** what to do. We see the problems with this world. We see the pain of our lives. They are calls from God. But we keep going in the wrong directions for answers. Lie still. Let God tell you what to do.

In our story from the First Book of Samuel, Eli has finally realized that **God** is calling Samuel. So something is happening even if Eli isn't doing it. Samuel finally realized that God is calling. So he should listen to God instead of getting up and trying to find out what to do on his own. Samuel is lying on his bed and verse ten reads: "Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.'" They've finally got it right. And the story continues: "Then the Lord said to Samuel, 'See, I am about to do something in Israel, that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle'."

When we finally get it right - when we know that the message comes from God - when we are willing to be still and hear the message - when we **want** to know what God wants us to know - the message will be more than we can imagine.

We've gotten tired. It is often our assessment that "the word of the Lord is rare and vision is not widespread." We go to sleep in the temple. But the lamp of God has not gone out. Be willing to ask. Be willing to say, "Speak, Lord, your servant hears." And be willing to listen. **Want** an answer.

Yes, it's true. We're not much. Just people. Regular folks. No more than a boy asleep in a temple...a temple not many people pay attention to. The world has always been that way. But that's where God comes and calls.

The whole world was dark. The word of God was rare. And Jesus came into a dark world and called.

Some said, "It's no message; I've never heard it before. Go back to sleep." Others went running off in the wrong direction. **But Jesus is still in this old temple of a world - calling your name**.

God has "ear tingling" news. All we have to do is say, "Speak, your servant hears." That is no small prayer - to hear the word of God.

And your ears will tingle with what God wants to do - with you. Your life is so important that God himself wants it. All of it. If you give it to him, he will accomplish things. Forgiveness, growth, direction.

I can't tell you what God can do with your life anymore than Eli could tell Samuel. I can tell you that **God** will let you know. God will give you a vision and a purpose. Through you, he will continue to walk the world calling the names of sleeping servants, using your voice to wake them up.

If you are willing.

God is calling you.

Pray that simplest, but most ear-tingling prayer, "Speak, Lord, your servant hears you."