

Bellaire Community United Methodist Church

May 8, 2016

“Can You Hear Me Now?”

“Let the Children Come” – part 1

1 Samuel 3:1-21

Good Morning! Happy Mother’s Day! My name is Katja Falker and while I am not the Pastor here at Bellaire Community United Methodist Church, I am his wife. Pastor Eric had surgery on Friday and is still recovering. I was very honored and excited when he asked me to preach the first sermon in a series on children in the Bible. This is a first for us and I pray that you will be as blessed by this opportunity as I have been. It certainly makes me appreciate all the work he puts into his weekly sermon preparations!

I am so glad that you got up this morning and decided to join us. You certainly are in the right place. I know that Mother’s Day can be a hard day for some of us, but what better place to be in than to be surrounded by friends and family who can comfort us when we need it most.

If you are here for the first time today, I want to let you know up front that we are not perfect. If we were, there would be no reason for us to be here. But we are all people in need of God’s loving grace. We welcome you with open arms and hearts.

I invite you to pray with me this morning.

Almighty Father, we are here to listen to your Word. We know that you have something to tell us today, and we are ready to receive that word. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to You, LORD, my rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

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Every family, organization, or even country needs a great leader to become great. We know that too well in this country. As we are preparing to elect a new president in November, we are bombarded with information from different candidates and their stances on lots of topics. Of course, the field of possible nominees is getting smaller as of late.

Our scripture today is set in the time of the judges. Israel was a relatively young nation. God raised up different people to lead the Israelites in battle when necessary, but there was no one leader or king. Nobody was watching debates on Fox news to make up their mind on who they should vote for; people just stepped up to the plate when they were needed.

Eli was the high priest and served Israel at the tabernacle in Shiloh alongside his two sons Hophni and Phineas. Pastor Eric just told us about them a few weeks ago, so if you missed that sermon, it is available on our website.

The Israelites would come to the tabernacle in Shiloh at least once a year to present their sacrifices to God. This included Samuel's mother, Hannah. Even though her husband loved her dearly, she was barren. Today Hannah would probably enlist the help of an infertility specialist, but back then she did not have that choice.

Instead she went to the tabernacle to pour her heart out to God. She asked him for a son and promised to give him back to God, if only the Lord would hear her. This was a private prayer between her and God, alone in the tabernacle.

God rewarded her faithfulness with a child, whom she named "Samuel", which means "I asked the LORD for him". After Samuel was weaned, she took him back to

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the tabernacle. She fulfilled her vow and put her son in the service of God. Hannah did not hesitate to fulfill her promise, which tells me that she possessed incredible strength.

By the time the story reaches chapter 3, Samuel has lived and ministered at the tabernacle under Eli for a few years. While we don't know exactly how old Samuel is at this point, the historian Josephus suggests that he would have been about twelve years old.

The text emphasizes the fact that God has been silent and there have not been any visions for a long time in Israel (1 Samuel 3:1). Eli, who is blind to the behavior of his sons, is now also physically blind. The young Samuel is sleeping in the middle of the tabernacle, right next to the ark of the covenant.

Let's take another look at our scripture, starting at verse 4. Samuel, who has just gone to bed, is woken by someone calling his name. He always responds quickly to Eli, so he jumps up and runs to Eli's side: "Here I am, you called me." (3:5)

Eli, who was asleep, is surprised and sends him back to bed. Samuel obeys and goes back to lie down. A short time later, he again hears a voice calling his name. He quickly goes over to Eli again, but, as before, he is sent back to his bed. Eli is gentle with Samuel, "My son, ... I did not call; go back and lie down." You can tell how fond he is of him.

After Eli sends him back to his bed the second time, Samuel hears his name called again. Immediately he gets up and hurries to Eli's side. The old priest, who probably thought Samuel was dreaming, was pretty exasperated at this point. Obviously he was a bit rusty in the "talking to God" department as it takes him a while to realize that there is more to the boy coming to his side in the middle of the night.

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Now, I don't know about you, but I can definitely relate to how Eli must have been feeling. My 8-year-old is very good at quietly coming into my bedroom early in the morning with really important questions: "Mom, Mom, MOM! MOMMY! Can I put on my soccer uniform for my game tonight?", all the while poking me. At six in the morning this is not nearly as funny as it is right now, but you can be sure that I tell him the first time around to go ahead, so I can get a bit more sleep.

Finally Eli instructs Samuel to go back and lie down, but now he also instructs him to answer, if he is called again: "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." (3:9b)

Luckily the Lord was patient with both Samuel and Eli. He calls Samuel again, and this time Samuel is ready. He does as he was instructed and tells the Lord that he is ready to listen.

The word of God is about to finally be heard again in Israel. This time, the high priest would not be the recipient of the message, but rather a young boy, who was born as an answer to prayer and dedicated to the service of God. Even though Samuel serves God diligently, he has not been introduced to who God really is. He does not know what to make of the voice he is hearing, but he does not question Eli's command and opens himself up to be filled with the word of God.

So while this a great story about a young boy being called by God, why are we talking about it today?

Just like in the time of the judges, we struggle to hear the word of God. Lots of distractions and differing views abound in our world and are trying to convince us that they are the most important thing right now. If we are honest, we have asked ourselves if the Word of God can even be heard by anyone anymore.

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Like Hannah, we face lots of personal battles. I pray that we don't ever have to face infertility, the loss of a child, bullying from a rival, or depression, but I know that some of us do face those things. How badly do we long to hear God call our name in those times? I believe that we can identify with Hannah. She longed for a family to love and care for, even if it she had to let go after just a short time. Despite her devastation, she pulled herself together and went to the Lord in her prayer and was rewarded for it.

But what about Samuel? It was not his choice to only spend a few years with his parents. Hannah must have done a phenomenal job of grounding him in the short time she had with him. He fulfilled his mother's vow without grumbling or complaining. We know that he was still really young when Hannah dropped him off at Eli's "Tabernacle Long-term Daycare". Samuel might have been 3 or 4 years old, and from then on he only got to see his parents once a year when they came to Shiloh to sacrifice and bring him his new robes.

From a very young age Samuel started serving the Lord as he was raised by the high priest Eli in the tabernacle. Samuel had terrible role models in Eli's sons Hophni and Phineas, who did not follow the laws of God. Nevertheless Samuel learned to hear God's voice in the same tabernacle that Eli's sons had dishonored. He eventually replaced Eli as the high priest, became the last and greatest judge of Israel, served as a prophet to the nation, and ultimately installed Saul as the first king of Israel. He continued his service to the Lord even then and confronted Saul with his behavior and established David as the next king.

Samuel, the boy who was placed in the service of God without any say, rose up to the expectations placed in front of him. He surpassed them and made himself a

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vessel for the Lord; he was willing to make God the most important thing in his life.

Even though Eli had to teach him how to actually respond to God's calling, Samuel was unquestioning and knew how to listen. He met God as a child with his child-like faith. He was not corrupted by his surroundings.

God does not look at age; he looks at our heart and our willingness to serve. If a twelve-year old boy, who had not even been exposed to the word of God, can learn to listen to him, how much more should we be able to open our lives up to God?

We long to hear from God in our lives. While we might hear from him directly, most often it will be indirect little "nudges". Maybe we need to train our "inner-ear" to recognize those better.

When Eric and I first met, we were helping some of our missionary friends reach out to the people in the city we lived in. One young man named Marek had asked for a visit from the team and Eric and I went to his apartment. I was very nervous about the visit as I was still a new Christian myself and Eric's German was still a little limited. While we were talking to Marek we could feel the calm and guidance of the Holy Spirit. We were able to show him Bible verses, that at least I had no idea even existed. All three of us had an interest in God's word, but ultimately only Eric and I were ready to hear from God directly and for him to guide our words.

This kind of guidance might not happen to all of us and certainly not all the time. If we ground ourselves in prayer and anticipate God will speak to us, he will find a way to meet us where we are. It might not be an audible voice, but he will make himself known.

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There will be times in our lives where it will be easier to discern God's voice.

When we are filled with raw emotions, our hearts are open and long to be filled. C.S. Lewis said that "God whispers to us in joy, speaks to us in sorrow, shouts to us in pain". Even though pain is not something we long to experience, maybe, just maybe, it opens us up to a deeper encounter with our God, who wants to comfort us.

We are blessed by all the people who are teaching us more about what God wants to do in our lives. Let's return that blessing and invest ourselves in someone else's life, so they too can learn to listen and experience God's love for us.

As we enter this time of prayer, I invite you to lift up those people who have helped you to listen to God's voice and those in need to hear it.

MOTHER'S DAY PRAYER by Judy Vidakovich

"Gracious God, giver of life and love, we thank you for the mothers in our lives who have extended love to us. We pray for those who find this day of honoring mothers to be painful or difficult. Be with those grieving the loss of mothers. Be with women who have been unable to bear children, and with mothers who have lost a child. Be with mothers who are unable to care for their children. Be with those who were abused or neglected by their mothers. Bring healing in all of these situations. Help us to recognize those who have been motherly to us, and yet are not our biological mothers. Bless those who have mothered us in the Christian faith. Help each of us, regardless of our age or gender, encourage and love one another as members of God's family.

Amen."