

1 Samuel 3:1-20

1 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. 2 At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; 3 the 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. 4 Then the Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" 5 and 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. 6 The 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." 7 Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. 8 The 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. 9 Therefore 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. 10 Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

11 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. 12 On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. 13 For 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. 14 Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering forever." 15 Samuel lay there until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. 16 But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." He said, "Here I am." 17 Eli 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." 18 So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. Then he said, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him." 19 As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. 20 And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord.

SPEAK LORD, FOR YOUR SERVANT IS LISTENING.

One of my favorite stories from the Hebrew scriptures. SO much is revealed about God and about how we can respond to God in our lives.

Story is about Discipleship and Discernment of God

Perception of God in our lives = discernment

Response to God in our lives = discipleship

Discipleship and discernment:

Need three things to accomplish this:

1. Be quiet.
2. Be in conversation in community.
3. Willingness to put aside MY plan for God's plan.

Samuel's call narrative is perfect for us today at St. Martin's as we start to do our own work of vision and identity.

Get the setting; how things were before all this happened:

1. The Word of the Lord was rare, in those days; Visions were not widespread

Rare/precious = like a jewel, precious because of the lack of quantity

Visions not widespread = Eli's eyesight, state of Israel socially

Only time in all of Hebrew scripture those words show up

2. Several obstacles in the way of even the possibility of this revelation:
 - a. Samuel is a boy—children had very little to no social standing or even relevance.

Samuel is a boy, maybe 6 or 7. Eli is “very old” and almost blind.
 - b. The word was rare in those days.
 - c. Visions not widespread.

Strikes me that God needs both the young and old and everyone in between to help interpret and understand God's will or even to hear God's voice when God calls.

Doesn't matter the age or ability or life-skills of the person, God shows up to whom God will show up.

Eli's role in this:

He recognizes that God is the one speaking.

He is a priest of the Lord.

Old—eyes had grown dim. Hard to see. Elderly. Contrast with Moses who had excellent “vision” throughout his entire life.

But had enough wisdom to know how to counsel the boy as to how to respond appropriately to God.

Here I am

Here I am vs. Speak Lord for your servant is listening

Here I am is loaded with meaning. Hebrew: *Hineni*. Heh-NAY-nee. Word of identification. Word of election. Word of self-selection. **WORD OF SPIRITUAL OPENNESS.**

Isaiah says this in his own brush with the voice of YHWH (see: Isaiah 6:8: I heard the voice of the Lord: who will go for us? I said, Here am I; send me.)

On the face of it “Here I am” “*hineni*” is a great start to things.

Better than running away, hiding, cowering in fear, being angry, etc.

But, not really what God or the situation required as we learn later in the passage.

God knew Samuel—as God knows each of us.

God knew where Samuel was—wasn't searching for him...knows where we are too

When finally Eli realizes what is going on:

Eli gives Samuel the tool to unlock the puzzle of that night.

Who WAS it who was calling the boy?

[Sidebar: Don't be too hard on old Eli that it took him two or three times of Samuel running into his room in the middle of the night before he “got it.” Remember: “the word of the Lord was rare in those days.” In the end it is Eli who SEES through Samuel's confusion over who is calling him in the middle of the night.]

Truth is we need both “Here I am” and “Speak Lord, your servant is listening”...

to get an idea about discipleship:

how to serve God in the moment, doing God's will, living more fully into who God is calling us to become, now.

Discipleship also has to do with agency and ownership of "the mission":

Samuel gives up his own agency and takes on what God wants to have happen.

Moment ago...said true discipleship means we need to do both here I am and speak we are listening. Truth be told, we need to do one a lot more than the other (and this will be hard for us to hear)

In terms of agency:

1. Here I am

= Identification of being present; ascent to being present.

But is really your own agency in force.

2. Speak Lord for your servant is listening

= Quietness of letting GOD do the talking

= giving up that agency of me, me, me...

to let God do, and be, and reveal whatever God is about to do, be, or reveal.

= deference to God's plan, putting away what we want, need, etc.

For us today: How do we get to a deeper level of discipleship? What do we need to DO or BE in order to more fully become the beloved disciples of God?

1. Pray. Prayer is a basic necessity in the creation of and deepening of our discipleship.
2. Prayer is both our *Hineni* and our Speak Lord for your servant is listening. Prayer is the foundation upon which a true relationship with God is built and maintained.

Building relationship with God (discipleship) means having a dialogue with God, not a you-centered monologue (= *Hineni*)

In our conversations with God, less talking and listening more is the rule of thumb

If talking 50% of the time pretty good, but need to follow Eli's advice to Samuel and invite God to speak to us.

Like any good relationship, can't do all the talking

Spoiler Alert: Lent = a perfect time to work on at LEAST having equal parts talking and listening

What God reveals to Samuel is devastating. Sometimes God is like that. We don't get to listen to only the things that we want to hear—we have to listen to the whole of it and then move forward in faith.

See Eli's response to this calamitous revelation: "It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him."

Even though blind of sight, Eli shows sharp insight, dignity, humility.

Conclusion

At this moment in our parish life together this passage from 1 Samuel is so important for us to hear and to inwardly digest both as individual Christians, but us as St. Martin's the body of Christ.

We can glean a great deal about both discernment and discipleship:

1. Best discernment comes when done in conversation in community.

- Not done alone, but validated by trusted mentors.
- Who are the people—MENTORS, like Eli was for Samuel—who help us to recognize the Word when we hear it?
- Who tune us in to hearing the word of God more clearly?
- Who help attune our ears and our hearts to God's voice and call and proximity to us—can help us to identify God's voice?
- Do not have a pre-conceived idea about who we think can discern the voice of God, or to whom God will choose to reveal God's plan.

2. We need both *Hineni* and Speak Lord, your servant is listening.

- Year of discernment about who God is calling us to be as God's beloved disciples NOW—why we are doing this work over the course of this year.
- We need to take the time to hear God's voice and discern the vision that God will reveal to us today, now...here in this place.
- Samuel was God's trustworthy judge of Israel.
- For us to become trustworthy we need to intentionally find ways to nurture our ability to hear God's voice and then trust in God's voice within our community of faith.
- We need to spend more time listening for the voice of God to speak to us by deepening our prayer life, our conversations with God.

3. Giving up of our own personal crusades and individual agency in order to become more fully God's agents as we take on God's mission and plan for us.

- I am positive that God is about to do something new.
- What is God about to do here at St. Martin's?
- What do you hear or experience that makes your ears tingle—not just a single-ear-tingling, but BOTH ears tingle?
- Reality: Sometimes we are called to let go of something---even something beloved or cherished or hard-worked-for in order to do the “new thing” that will make BOTH our ears tingle.
- At St. Martin's this may mean letting go of certain ministries, this may be finding new traditions, or modifying how “we've always done it that way”, this may mean creating something brand new.
- Unlike what God revealed through Samuel about Eli's family, I am so excited to see and hear what God will reveal to our parish family in the coming year--NOT as calamitous but as a truly joyful, inspiring, life-giving revelation about our roles as those who bring the Good News of God in Christ to this corner of God's creation.
- Point is that we need to take ourselves and our desires to protect what is “ours” and open ourselves up completely to being responsive to what way of being God is calling us to be now, in this time, in this place.
- And, if in the end, what is discerned isn't exactly what you had been hoping for, to take a page out of Samuel's mentor, Eli's book and leave it in God's capable and never-failing hands.