

**Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church**  
**Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena**

**January 18, 2009**

**Second Sunday in Ordinary Time**

I Samuel 3:1-10

<sup>1</sup>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.

<sup>2</sup>At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>Then the Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>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." <sup>7</sup>Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>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.

<sup>10</sup>Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

John 1:43-51

<sup>43</sup>The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."  
<sup>44</sup>Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. <sup>45</sup>Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." <sup>46</sup>Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." <sup>47</sup>When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" <sup>48</sup>Nathanael asked him, "Where did you come to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." <sup>49</sup>Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" <sup>50</sup>Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." <sup>51</sup>And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

## **“You Voice Is God’s Voice”**

### **“VISIONS WERE NOT WIDESPREAD” -- I Samuel 3:1**

**Eli, Eli, Eli, ...there he was that old man who was the high priest. It had been quite a run. He has served well the Lord in that place. Now he was seasoned and the years were catching up with him for sure. The text puts it this way. “Visions were not widespread.” ...and... “At that time, Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see...”**

**It shows his age. Eli is old. His time was almost finished. There is some irony here. Visions are rare in those days and the high priest is old enough that he is losing his vision. He cannot see—literally, and he cannot see—spiritually. Eli was waiting for a vision of what God had for him. He was astute enough to know that there was still more vision to come even though his eyesight had grown dim.**

**Do we get that? I ask you do you understand that? Do you believe it? You are Eli! Yes, you are Eli in this story. We are the established church. We are the ones who have been around through the good years and lean years. We have seen the decades come and go. We remember the 50s when everybody went to church because that was what you did then.**

**We remember the 60s when the young people left the church in droves. We said that they would be back when it came time for their babies to be baptized, but so many of them never came back to the church or any of the other institutions that their parents had so valued and believed in. We remember the 70s too with its emphasis on justice and its growing controversy about everything from the Vietnam War to Angela Davis. Oh, and then came about the 80 with internal church warfare on issues like homosexuality and abortion that have continued to stymie the church until today.**

**All of it looks like a march not of freedom and victory but a march to the grave of the institutional church. We have seen the rise of the fundamentalists and the explosion of the evangelicals, and dare we speak of the decline of the mainline church. We know there will be losses each year and avoid adding the numbers up so that we do not have to face the realities that in our own beloved PCUSA we have seen a million members slip away in a couple decades.**

**We look locally at our own and say the pews are not full at the same time condemning any preacher that would dare to imply that our faith obligates us to attendance every Sunday morning. It's all part and parcel of the Eli syndrome—visions were not widespread! Our eyesight has grown dim! We believe it won't be long before the doors close.**

**Do you believe it? That our eyesight has faded away and that visions are part of yesteryear. Oh, sister and brother listen up. You better not believe it. You better not be thinking that dimness or fewer visions means that the end is near.**

**Eli knew it. Eli knew that even when he could not see, God had a vision. Eli knew it. He knew that even when his visions were lacking, God's vision was complete. Eli knew it. Eli had enough vision left in him in order to know that God had not left the temple and was not abandoning the post. God had a way. God had a plan. God had a road map. God had a vision. And Eli—Eli knew it.**

**His eyesight may have grown dim and visions may not have been widespread, but his knowing of the Lord who had called him and set him apart was fully intact. He knew the Lord and he knew that the Lord had a plan for his house.**

**Do you know it? Do you believe it? Do you believe that the Lord has a plan for this house and for your house? Do you know it? Do you believe**

**it? Do you believe that the Lord has a vision for your life and pouring that out upon you? Do you believe it and are you ready to receive it?**

**Are you ready....because, God is in this Jesus of Nazareth doing a new thing and calling you to come and see in your own life and this world today the wonders that God wants you to be a part of. Yes the dream of God that wells up into reality is in you....it is in you old Eli! Do you believe it?**

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**“NOW THE BOY SAMUEL WAS MINISTERING TO THE LORD UNDER ELI.” --I Samuel 3:1**

**You do not have to read very far in this first book of Samuel in order to learn that Eli has some family troubles of his own. His family is not your ideal family. Now how this whole high priest thing worked is that it was passed on in the family to the next in line who was to serve loyally and faithfully the duties and calling of God.**

**Eli’s family is hardly a role model here. They are not capable. They are not the fitting ones to serve the Lord. With Eli visions were hardly widespread, and with his sons they would surely not grow any wider, deeper, or more frequent. No way.**

**And onto the scene comes Samuel. You may remember how Samuel gets there. Hannah had prayed and prayed to have a son and promised him to the Lord should she so be blessed. She received that blessing and she followed through fully on the promise and presented the son to the Lord. She so presented him that he resided in the temple as the Lord’s servant. And as we encounter the boy here in today’s passage we would see him in that role of attending to the needs of Eli who was certainly in the winter of his life.**

All that is to say that Eli has enough going on with his own sons and nurturing them into what should be their legacy, that he hardly has time to take care of and take into his life little Samuel. But he does do just that. The boy lives there in the temple with him. The boy is his responsibility. The boy's welfare and worldly way including shelter, food, education, clothing—all of it, oh all of it became the responsibility of Eli.

Eli took care of the boy. Was he his kin? No. Was he bound to do this? No. Was he obligated to do this? No.

You probably think you know where I am going with this. That I am going to lay on you the burden of taking care of those who are not your own. That I am going to press you into service in such a way that you see that you have a responsibility to help cloth, and shelter, and nurture those who have no other in this world.

Is that where I am going? Only partially. Yes, Eli did extend himself a great deal here. And yes, you have enough in your store house of wealth—all of us are wealthy—you have it you just are accustomed to keeping it for yourself. You have it and it is not yours—it is God's money you are hanging onto. It is God's wealth that is in your wallet and your bank account and you had better be spending it freely on God's children of this world rather than hoarding it for yourself.

Is that where I am going? Oh you have heard me preach that before. So replay those tapes, but listen up here because it matters what Eli does. Did you hear how that text reads? Did you hear it? Listen to it: "Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli."

The point here is that the relationship is not merely one of care taker and one who is taken care of. The relationship is deeper than that. Samuel's relationship is not first and foremost to Eli. Eli's relationship is not first and foremost to Samuel. No. The relationship is to the Lord. The

**text does not say that the boy Samuel was ministering to Eli or even that Eli was ministering to Samuel. No. The text is clear—the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli.**

**See the relationship—the primary relationship is to the Lord. And we are pressed into serve as the Elis of this age in such a way that we are to enable the ministry of others in this age. We are to provide the means and the mechanisms for others to make a difference in this world and touch this world with the reality of Christ.**

**You can see that in the gospel lesson with Jesus. He gave Nathanael enough in order to allow him to graciously choose to follow Jesus on this great expedition of faith. Are we doing that? Are we being Eli enough? Are we giving others what they need in order to grow into a faithful following and life of giving themselves to God’s purposes? Are we doing that?**

**Can you cite specific ways that you are enabling the ministry of those who are coming after you so that they may serve the Lord? We are Eli, and we had better be in the business of making it possible that those around us can be living into their own callings as disciples and followers of God.**

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**“THEN ELI PERCEIVED THAT THE LORD WAS CALLING THE BOY.” – I Samuel 3:8**

**It is a wonderful story. Samuel hears his name being called. “Samuel. Samuel.” And he gets up, knowing that if there is one calling out to him in the night then surely it is Eli. He rushes into Eli’s chamber and says, “Here I am.” “You called and here I am.”**

**Eli tells him, “I did not call you. Now go back to bed.” And this interchange and calling goes on three full times. Samuel knows that he**

hears his name being called and it awakens him. Eli knows that he has not called the boy.

Long about the third time Eli realizes what is happening. Eli, for a man of little eyesight and even less vision, he gets what is going on here. He perceives that it is the Lord calling the boy. This time Eli is careful to tell the boy what to do. He tells him that the next time he hears his name being called he should answer to it: “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

It is then that we are told the Lord comes, stands there, and calls as before, “Samuel, Samuel.”

You talk about visions being rare...when was the last time you heard the voice of God calling out to you in an audible voice? When was the last time you saw the Lord standing before you calling out to you in that way?

This is not the way we experience the voice and presence of God. In these days the physical tangible way the Lord speaks is different. The Lord’s voice is physically spoken in the Sacraments—in the wine and bread and water—those are the physical voice of God speaking to us in Word and Scripture.

Do we hear the voice of God? Yes. Oh yes. Does God really, I mean really talk? Does God? Yes, oh yes. God does not just speak to us, but in us, and through us. It is that knowing that is not explained logically—that is the Lord’s voice in us. It is that just knowing that we should do this or that—that is the voice of God speaking in you.

It is that trusting, that confidence, that internal “Yes” that can overcome all the doubt—that is the voice of God in the power of the Holy Spirit speaking to you. It is trustworthy. It is real. It is the voice of God.

**But more than that—we hear God’s voice in each other. If we listen, we are the Eli’s. Samuel would have never heard the voice of the Lord were it not for Eli perceiving it and pointing him toward it. “Now Samuel, you go and lie down and next time you hear your name called you go ahead and answer it and say....speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”**

**Do we hear the voice of God? Yes. We hear it spoken all the time. In the Scriptures, in the Sacraments, but more than that—in each other. We hear the voice of God in each other. It is what it means to be in relationship and in community with each other. We can perceive the Lord and even hear the Lord in each other.**

**That is why it matters that we deepen our relationships with each other and be in community with one another. The voice of God is in your voice. Claim that. Realize that. And see, oh see, that it matters how you speak and how you share.**

**As each of us follows Christ—and as together we follow Christ as a community we are voicing to each other the living presence of the Holy Spirit God who abides in us in faithfulness. Allow your life so to be used that your life becomes this holy resonance of what God wants to say to the world.**

**Your being resonates the presence of God...Eli perceived it was the Lord.**

**Perceive it. It is the Lord—resonating, speaking, voicing...through you. Are you perceiving it?**

**Philip said it to Nathanael, “come and see.” I invite you to do the same with the voice of the Lord in you—look and see. Do you hear it? Do you live it? Is it the resonance of your vocal cords and your lifeblood?**

**Amen.**