



Season of Lay Ministries

Second Sunday of Epiphany

14 January 2024

Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. (1 Samuel 3:1-10 [11-20])

Readings

1 Samuel 3:1-10 [11-20]

Psalm 139: 1-5;12-18 or 1-9

Revelations 5:1-10

John 1:43-end

A common strand in our readings today is the different accounts of human encounter with the divine. In our reading from 1 Samuel 3, we hear the story of Samuel who encountered God when 'he did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him'. This may appear confusing when it is considered in the light of the knowledge that as a child Samuel had been dedicated by his parents to the service of God and had in fact grown up within the temple.

Does this mean then that throughout Samuel's formative years, he had not known the temple as a 'dwelling' of the most high or observed acts of worship or heard the 'word of the Lord' spoken in the temple?

Of course, Samuel's ignorance does not mean that he was not aware of his physical environment or indeed the business of the temple. Rather, what the author of this passage wished to demonstrate was that at the point of his encounter with the divine, Samuel had not known the Lord in any personal way, neither had the word of the Lord - a revelation of his mind and will, be made known to him. In other words, God knew Samuel before Samuel knew God.

Likewise, in our gospel reading from John, we hear the story of how Jesus first recognised, then called Nathanael; and how Nathanael, ignorant of who Jesus then was, asked in return, "how do you know me?" So, it follows that in both the Old and New Testaments accounts we are presented with encounters with the divine wherein the Almighty God demonstrates

knowledge of and reveals himself first to humanity.

God's interaction with Samuel was particularly dramatic. Set in the middle of the night, young Samuel was unable to decipher who was calling him. He turned, again, and again to his spiritual parent, Eli, until he was properly guided. "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'"

As modern Christians, many of us might identify as 'Samuel' - yet to know the Lord in any personal way, and those to whom God's word is yet to be revealed. Like him, we may have grown up in, and attended the temple or church regularly or helped out in occasions, but have not really had a personal encounter with God. As a result, we may have written ourselves off as unready and unworthy to be called into His service.

Perhaps, some of us rather identify as Nathanael, upright and recognisable in our community; yet, waiting under the shadows and playing sceptic, until, invited by our friends, we go and see for ourselves, and then recognise that God had always known about us.

Either way, the underlining message appears to be that in our spiritual 'unconsciousness' God knows us and is eager to call us into his work of transformation. If only, as Samuel, we would listen and be courageous to say, 'speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'

God has a purpose for every one of his Creation. In the case of Samuel, that purpose, was to orchestrate a new order in Israel, one that would mark a turning point in the history of the Old Testament Kingdom of God. The period was described as one 'when there was no vision and the leadership over Israel was remarkably corrupt' (B.Dale in 'Samuel's Call to the Prophetic office.'). Yet, it was in such a period of darkness and corruption that God was most at work.

It was in that same period that he had chosen to reveal himself to the youngest and lowest in the temple and through him to herald a new order.

Therefore, the good news we are called to recognise today is how God has over the years revealed himself to and utilised all sorts of people, regardless of age, gender, knowledge or indeed any human characterisation, in his work of transformation. In this season of Lay Ministry therefore, it is perhaps worth reminding ourselves, clergy and laity, of the call to this collaborative work with God, and how to remain plugged into it.

So, if Samuel best describes our relationship with God, then we may do well to listen and be courageous to speak up when required to do so. We may seek to recognise the value of God's wisdom and spiritual direction that is found in the 'Elis' in the temple.

The Elis among us, may wish to pay particular attention to how the application of both wisdom and spiritual direction gave force to the Lord's judgment, and birthed a new dispensation. Both Samuel and Eli, all of us, need to stay alert, and to listen up, just in case the Lord comes calling in his troubled temple.

In the dark and corrupt days of Samuel, God was poised to do something new. Something that would make both the ears of hearers in Israel to "tingle." In our troubled and suffering world of today, God is no less determined in transforming lives. Are you ready to join him in that work?

Amen.

Christian Okoh, Reader, St John with Holy Trinity, Deptford

A prayer for the Season of Lay Ministries 2024

Written by Marie Williams, Southwark Pastoral Auxiliary (SPA), Holy Saviour, Croydon

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I; send me!' Isaiah 6:8 (NRSV)

Lord Jesus,
We give you thanks that
you consider us worthy to serve you
and have called us into ministries of many different kinds.

We pray for all those who are exploring what God's call means in their lives.
Help them to know God's peace and guiding as they listen for God's voice.

And we pray for those already in ministry that as they carry out your work you will help them to demonstrate your love,
your compassion and your truth
so that others may see your beauty and embrace you as Lord and Saviour
We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Suggested hymns

Master speak! Thy servant heareth
All Hail the power of Jesus name
Alleluia Sing to Jesus
I come with joy a child of God
Take my life and let it be
In Christ alone
O Jesus I have promised
Father, Lord of all creation