

Sermon on 1 Samuel 3:1-21
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Aitkin, Minnesota

Dear Friends in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen

Dr. Gerhard Frost, who taught Parish Education at Luther Seminary, used to jot down notes on events, recording them in a notebook. Later he would flesh them out. This started back when as a young man he worked through North Dakota and northern Minnesota as a harvest hand.

Many of these notes became poems and in one of them, entitled “She Wouldn’t Say Thank You”, Frost tells of a little girl who had just received a vaccination injection from a doctor. Her mother told her to say thank you to the doctor. She wouldn’t. Again her mother urged her to say thank you and again she refused. It hurt and she wasn’t going to say something she didn’t believe. Frost ended the poem with something like, “God bless her, she wouldn’t say thank you.” She wouldn’t go against her beliefs.

In our Scripture passage today from 1 Samuel, we hear that a young boy named Samuel is sleeping in the shrine or temple at the city of Shiloh. He had been dedicated to the Lord by his mother from before his birth. He is sleeping in the same room as the Ark of the Covenant, the holy gold-covered wooden box containing the Ten Commandment tablets, manna and Moses’ flowering staff.

It is almost morning but still dark and Samuel hears his name called. Thinking it is the elderly priest Eli calling him he runs to answer him. Eli says he did not call him. This happens three times and finally Eli understands it is the Lord God calling to Samuel. Eli tells Samuel that if the Lord calls again to answer this way, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

The Lord comes and stands in the Temple at Shiloh and says, “Samuel, Samuel!” Samuel responds this way and listen carefully, “Speak, for your servant is listening” What’s missing? The word Lord. Why didn’t Samuel say Lord? Is it just the way the story was told and it means nothing? Or like the little girl who wouldn’t say “Thank You”, is Samuel not saying something he doesn’t believe or own yet?

Going back in our passage we are told in verse 7, “Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.” When I read this verse I thought, how could this boy, maybe 6 to 15 years old not know the Lord? How could he have not been told about God, especially since his mother had promised to dedicate her son to the Lord if the Lord would let her become pregnant? It can make us wonder what is going on here. Now days, there are many kids that age who don’t know the Lord because they haven’t been told about God by anyone. But here?

One Biblical scholar noted in his commentary something interesting and maybe very important. He said that the word “know” used here and the word “hear” in the Hebrew

are the same word. What if what is meant is this: Samuel has been serving the Lord in the Temple at Shiloh but has not “heard” the Lord speak to him yet? God has not given Samuel a message from God yet---but that is about to change.

One of the seminary interns that I supervised had been a Parish Education Director before going to seminary. One day as we talked about children learning she said something that should have been obvious to me, but it sounded new: “Education is foundational; it grows upon what has come before.” Education in faith, trusting in the Lord comes from what has happened before: learning to pray, singing religious songs, hearing Bible stories, Sunday School, Confirmation, youth group meetings, mission trips, Bible studies, Via De Cristo weekends reading our Bibles, listening to sermons, reading our devotionals. Education in faith grows from seeing our parents, grandparents, mentors, pastors, teachers, friends and others in the church living their life of faith. All these are ways we hear the Lord and come to “know” the Lord, to live into a relationship with our Lord and Savior.

Samuel may have been honest when he left out “Lord” in his response. Maybe he didn’t know the Lord in a faith way yet. But he was open to hearing what God had to say. He would go on to be the major prophet in the years 1050 to 980 B.C. He would be a priest, offering sacrifices to the Lord and anointing first Saul and then David as the first two kings of Israel. He would be the prophet of God, speaking the message of the Lord in this time. Priest and prophet. Prophet means one who has a message from the Lord, not one who predicts the future, but one who hears the Lord as a servant, like Samuel did, and then telling that message to God’s people.

Most of us are not called like Samuel to be a prophet or a pastor in an official way. But are we still called by the Lord Jesus to listen to what He is telling us? Are our children being called by the Lord Jesus to hear and listen to Him? Of course we are and that’s why churches are such good places.

Here, in a church like this one, we promise to teach our children to pray, to read God’s Word, to come to worship where God’s Word is preached so that faith grows as our children hear and listen to God speaking to them. At our Confirmation we promise to read God’s Word, to attend worship and hear God’s Word. Churches are such wonderful places and communities because here in this place and the experiences of it, we can hear the Lord and grow in knowing the Lord.

In my first congregation, one Sunday after Sunday School was over, a little girl by the name of Missy got left behind. The church had no phone so she and I sat on the steps of the sanctuary and talked. Eventually her parents missed her and came back. Missy’s mother told me later that she asked Missy if she was scared, being left. She said, “No, mom, because God was there.” My wife volunteered to babysit a little girl who was too young for VBS so her mother could teach. My office was in the parsonage and as Jill explored the house that first day, she came to my office in the basement and asked my wife, “Is this where God works?”

Little kids often think that the pastor or pastors are God because we tell them, “We are going to church to hear God speak.” Meaning that the pastor will speak God’s word to us. Little kids hear it differently, but they get the idea of God speaking to us. God continues to speak to us in this place and through the opportunities of this and other church communities.

Yesterday, this church and seven others celebrated the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. It started on October 31st, 1517 as Martin Luther begin questioning how God’s Word could be heard more effectively. Luther wanted all services and sermons to be spoken in the language of the people—so they could hear God speaking. Luther translated the New Testament and eventually the whole Bible so people could hear God speaking to them directly. Martin Luther said God’s Word is our great heritage, a bulwark or fortress never failing us.

Do we know the Lord? Do we hear the Lord? Do we like Samuel need to say, “Speak, your servant is listening”, so we can more fully know the Lord, growing in faith upon what we have heard before? And if so, what will you do—or continue doing?