

This week we jump from the story God's Manna and provision for the Israelites in the wilderness of their Exodus freedom to the story of the call of Samuel, the great priest of Israel who ordained the first monarchs. It's the first in a series of four stories about how God calls us. We continue moving between stories of vocation in the First Testament.

In the unfolding history of Israel, we skip over the wandering of the people of God in the wilderness, their arrival and establishment in the promised land as well as the stories of the Judges and Ruth. Today's story is one of endings and a new beginning, law and gospel, of death and resurrection.

Today's story begins before the text we have. Samuel exists because of his mother Hannah (her name in Hebrew means "grace"); a barren woman who prays desperately for a child. Deemed drunk and crazy by the priests who hear her passionate prayer, she is vindicated by God's grace, giving birth to a son, Samuel, giving him to God to serve as a minister. Hence how he comes to be with Eli the priest. That crucial, yet often overlooked story of how women are yet again essential in the story of God's people, is told in 1 Samuel 1 and 2.

This also happens at a time of great spiritual malaise, institutional collapse and societal change. The sons of Eli were known as bad "pastor's kids," consistently using their power, privilege and institutional position to harass, steal and intimidate the people of God as they came to worship at the Tabernacle. They stole from the offering and the treasury. The story of their abuse of power and profaning of God's name is told in 1 Samuel 2:12-17.

SAMUEL the Hebrew name שמואל (Shemu'el) which could mean either "name of God" or "God has heard". His story is rooted in that of his mother, Hannah told in 1 Samuel 1:1-2:21. Her authentic piety in the midst of her abasement as a barren, leads to his birth through the power of prayer and the promise of God's saving justice. He comes, from before his conception, as a voice outside the conventions of institutional power and human convention.

Eli :: the Hebrew name עלי means "ascent". Alternatively, Eli may be an unrelated abbreviation of Hebrew names such as Elijah, Elisha, Eliezer, Elimelech, etc., all containing the element עלי, meaning "my God".

The word of the Lord was rare in those days: Was God's word withheld from the people because there were no prophets? Or was the word rare because the people couldn't hear it in this time of clerical abuse and institutional corruption? Was this the result of God's action or of that of the people, specifically Eli and his sons? Does this point to a distinction between reading (or having the word of God written down) and proclaiming or hearing or listening to it?

SCRIPTURES FOR

SUNDAY 10.15.2017

Exodus 1 Samuel 3:1-21; John 20:21-23

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

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."

the lamp of God :: This little phrase paints a vivid portrait of the condition of Israel at this time for the "lamps of God" in the tabernacle were to burn continually – a statute for all generations, an ever speaking testimony to trust in God's provision. Here we learn of the lamps burning out, neglected, forgotten as a metaphor for the faith of the people.

This refers back to the command of Leviticus 24:1-4 "1The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2 Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil of beaten olives for **the lamp**, that a light may be kept burning regularly. 3 Aaron shall set it up in the tent of meeting, outside the curtain of the covenant, to burn from evening to morning before the Lord regularly; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations. 4 He shall set up **the lamps** on the lampstand of pure gold before the Lord regularly."

Here I am :: Moses responded with this classic response to God's invitation at the burning bush (Exodus 3:4, just as Abraham did in Genesis 21:7 Hineni (הִנְנִי), which means "Here I am" – I'm ready to do your will. Many of the calls stories of the principal people of the First Testament include this response.

Peace :: The Hebrew word for peace, שָׁלוֹם | shalom, is derived from a root denoting wholeness or completeness, and its frame of reference throughout Jewish literature is bound up with the notion of shelemut, perfection.

Its significance is thus not limited to the political domain — to the absence of war and enmity — or to the social — to the absence of quarrel and strife. It ranges over several spheres and can refer in different contexts to bounteous physical conditions, to a moral value, and, ultimately, to a cosmic principle and divine attribute.

taken from www.myjewishlearning.com/article/shalom

As the Father has sent me, so I send you :: Theologically this is one of the centers of this teaching. Jesus was sent to serve, give his life for many, to show the Way, to reveal the Father, that we might live abundantly.

"I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17).

"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

"For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost" (Matthew 18:11).

"Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28).

"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

"Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Matthew 11:27).

"Jesus said to him, 'He who has seen Me has seen the Father'" (John 14:9).

breathed | Spirit :: The word Spirit in the Biblical languages of both Hebrew and Greek can mean: 1) spirit, as in ghost, 2) wind, and/or 3) breath.

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. ²¹ The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord.

John 20:21-23

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

²¹ Jesus said to them again, "**Peace** be with you. *As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*" ²² When he had said this, he **breathed** on them and said to them, "Receive the **holy Spirit**." ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Questions for the practice of Examen & Contemplation

- What shimmers for you in this passage?
- What image most speaks to you today?
- How does the story of the call of Samuel intersect your own story?
- How have you experienced God's call in your life? Is there a biblical story that your story echoes? Possibly one of those we've looked at this season: Adam and Eve; Abram and Sarah; Moses; Aaron, or Samuel? How so?
- Talk with God about your sense of calling or your desire to have a clearer sense of call and God's presence in your life.