14-20 December 2024 Recognising when and how God calls

! Samuel 3: 1-20

3 The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.

2 One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. 3 The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the Lord, where the ark of God was. 4 Then the Lord called Samuel.

Samuel answered, “Here I am.” 5 And he ran to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.”

But Eli said, “I did not call; go back and lie down.” So he went and lay down.

6 Again the Lord called, “Samuel!” And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.”

“My son,” Eli said, “I did not call; go back and lie down.”

7 Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.

8 A third time the Lord called, “Samuel!” And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.”

Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. 9 So Eli told Samuel, “Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

10 The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!”

Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

11 And the Lord said to Samuel: “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. 12 At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. 13 For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God,[a] and he failed to restrain them. 14 Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, ‘The guilt of Eli’s house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.’”

15 Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the Lord. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, 16 but Eli called him and said, “Samuel, my son.”

Samuel answered, “Here I am.”

17 “What was it he said to you?” Eli asked. “Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you.” 18 So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, “He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes.”

19 The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel’s words fall to the ground. 20 And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord.

**Bible notes**

In the dark days at the tail end of the time of the Judges, a time in Israel when life was chaotic and violent, and when the people had forgotten their links with God, a child is born. The birth of a child is often the harbinger of a new move of God. Samuel was born to a faithful mother, Hannah, who pledged to give her son to the service of God. So, here he is in the Temple with the old reprobate priest, Eli. People had forgotten what God’s voice sounded like.

But one night, God calls Samuel’s name. The boy had no idea it could be God, so he runs to Eli thinking he’s called him for something. After this has happened a couple of times, Eli twigs that it is God calling Samuel. So, the old priest tells him what to do and, when God calls again, Samuel is ready.

As ever, when it comes after a long absence, God’s presence is both welcome and unsettling. The new move of God would involve judgement on the house of Eli before renewal of the house of Israel. And the young Samuel faced a stern test. Eli instructed him to repeat all that God had said. What a tough ask for a young boy who had been raised by this elderly priest. But Samuel delivers the message God has given him and Eli believes it and submits to his fate. Samuel grows in stature and Israel is reborn under his leadership. It is an object lesson in God choosing who God pleases – even a child – to be both the messenger and instrument of renewal.

### ****Reflection****

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

As we tell Samuel’s story, we might ponder how it applies across our congregation. In particular, how might adults hear from God through children? What is the relationship between young and old in our church community? How can we create spaces where both learn together how to hear from God? Might this be the way that God starts something new and exciting in our church’s life? How will we all ensure that we not only hear what God is saying, but how together we might put it into practice?

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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**A revealing circle**

* This painting illustrate different ways in which God speaks; how many can you identify?
* When have you felt or known God calling you?
* How can we help each other to hear God’s call?

Prayer

Adapt to your local context.

**A prayer of praise**

We praise you, God of grace, for bringing into our lives   
those who draw us closer to you,  
those who speak your words of encouragement,   
those who believe in your calling for our lives,  
those whose testimonies inspire, excite and move us,  
and those who reflect your love, faithfulness and compassion,   
day by day.   
**Amen.**

## **A prayer to end the Bible study**

So now we go out with confidence in you,   
our loving God who leads us;  
you know our weaknesses and our strengths.  
**Lord, call us, guide us,**  
**and strengthen us in your service.**   
**Amen.**