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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
January 24, 2021
3rd Sunday after Epiphany

Scripture Lessons: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 John 1:43-51

Hymns: 281; 296; 412; 413:5,6

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 1 Samuel 3:1-10

Now the boy Samuel ministered to the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; *there was no widespread revelation.* ²And it came to pass at that time, while Eli was lying down in his place, and when his eyes had begun to grow so dim that he could not see, ³and before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle of the LORD where the ark of God was, and while Samuel was lying down, ⁴that the LORD called Samuel. And he answered, "Here I am!" ⁵So he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." And he said, "I did not call; lie down again." And he went and lay down.

⁶Then the LORD called yet again, "Samuel!"

So Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." He answered, "I did not call, my son; lie down again."

⁷(Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, nor was the word of the LORD yet revealed to him.)

⁸And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. So he arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you did call me."

Then Eli perceived that the LORD had called the boy. ⁹Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, 'Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰Now the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!"

And Samuel answered, "Speak, for Your servant hears." (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Epiphany – sudden enlightenment!

In the Epiphany season we focus much of our attention on how the glory of the Lord is revealed to sinful mankind. In this season of the church year we may read the accounts of Jesus' miracles, and how Jesus' manifested or revealed His glory through these signs and wonders. However, we often also read how many who witnessed the Lord's miracles failed to understand, failed to comprehend who this was and how the miracles demonstrated Jesus' true identity as the Son of God and our Savior. In our gospel lesson this morning we read how Jesus found Philip and called Philip to be His disciple, saying "Follow Me!" Philip went and found his friend Nathanael so that Nathanael also could come and see Jesus. Jesus then praised Nathanael's character, and when challenged by Nathanael, revealed His glory by speaking of a private moment Nathanael had under the fig tree before Philip had found him. This was Nathanael's call to discipleship, that he too should follow Jesus.

The point that the Holy Spirit would address for us in our text is connected to this event by Lord's calling of specific individuals. With His call Jesus had opened Philip and Nathanael's spiritual vision, so that they were called to faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. At the same time, they were called to discipleship, to follow Jesus, called to a life of serving the Lord. What our text demonstrates for us is that this is a timeless truth. While we will make the distinction that Philip and Nathanael and so also Samuel in our text were called to a special ministry (one as prophet, the other two as apostles), it is still the power and grace of the Lord's call that has brought us to know and believe **and serve** the Lord Jesus as our Redeemer and our God! Let us then consider --

THEME: The Lord's Call to Serve Him.

We need to begin with understanding --

I. The Grace of the Lord's Call.

Our text opens:

1 Samuel 3:1-4a “Now the boy Samuel ministered to the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; *there was no widespread revelation.* ² And it came to pass at that time, while Eli was lying down in his place, and when his eyes had begun to grow so dim that he could not see, ³ and before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle of the LORD where the ark of God was, and while Samuel was lying down, ⁴ that the LORD called Samuel.

There are a couple of points that we need to note in these opening words of our text. While the account of the early life of Samuel is central to these events, it is important for us to note the Spirit's description of the spiritual state of Israel at this time. “*And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation.*” (v.1) There was at best a terrible spiritual apathy among the Israelites at this point in their history. This apathy was exacerbated by the wickedness of the High Priest's two sons whose behavior as the chief priests leading the ministry at the Tabernacle of the Lord was beyond offensive. It was blasphemous and wicked, stealing from the sacrifices and committing sins of adultery right in the Tabernacle of the Lord! The High Priest Eli only mildly rebuked them when they should have been removed from office, indeed they should have been put to death and replaced by others.

This disregard for the Word of the Lord at the highest levels characterized what was rampant in society. We read of this people of Israel's history in the book of Judges: “*In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*” (Judges 17:6) There was little or no concern for what was right in the Lord's eyes! A great deal of evil prevailed, while only a remnant of the people walked in the ways of the Lord. That is undoubtedly what led to the spiritual state that “*the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation.*” (v.1)

Samuel was a boy, perhaps not even in his early teens at the time of these events. Remember that his mother Hanna had been desperate for a child and had promised the Lord to dedicate her child to the Lord if she were granted this blessing of a child. And so Samuel was brought to Eli the High Priest soon after he was weaned and Samuel served as a personal attendant to the High Priest from early childhood.

This was all part of God's grace, not only toward Samuel, but toward an evil and adulterous nation. Though one might conclude that Samuel was a good boy who served Eli faithfully, this did not merit favor from God. It was however all part of God's plan to bring grace not only to Samuel, but also to His people Israel.

The time when the word of the Lord was rare, and when there was no revelation was about to come to an end. But think about that for a moment. How empty life had to be, how worldly the people had become! A people who had been chosen by God as His own special people had fallen so far from the Lord! Their neglect of the Word, and the practice of true worship had left them in that place where there was no revelation of God's truth for the people to hear, to guide them in life, to show them the way of life eternal.

When we look at the spiritual state of our own American society, we see a great deal of apostasy, a falling away from God's truth. We thank the Lord that there are a number of Christian denominations who still regard God's Word as sacred and gladly hear and learn it. However so much of what now characterizes the morality of our society is not determined by the precepts of God's Word, but what people see as right in their own eyes. And sadly, that is what is being presented as truth from many Christian pulpits in America today. The Word of God as the standard of faith and life has become rare. The revelation of God's will and saving grace has been supplanted by the wisdom of man, and political correctness, and everchanging social mores.

Now, let us beware lest we think we are more worthy of God's calling than the rest of society. Isaiah characterized us well, yes us, the believers, when he wrote by inspiration, "*We have sinned—In these ways we continue; And we need to be saved.* ⁶ *But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy*

rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.” (Isaiah 64:5-6) There is an expression that is good for all of us to recall as we look at the evil that surrounds us in this world: *“There, but for the grace of God, go I!”*

Grace is what makes all the difference. Patient and persistence in His will to save, God calls. The calling of Samuel was special, as special as when the Lord Jesus called his disciples to follow Him. It was special in the form it took, and in the mission or ministry to which these individuals were called. Samuel, at such a young age, was called by God to be the Lord’s prophet. He was to faithfully present first to Eli, but then ultimately to the rest of the nation of Israel, God’s revelation as it was given to Samuel by the Holy Spirit.

This account of the calling of Samuel is familiar to us all. We know how it was that Samuel in his youth mistook the Lord’s voice for that of Eli whom Samuel served. Samuel showed his spirit of obedience in running to Eli time and again as the Lord called to Samuel. It was Eli who ascertained that it must be the Lord calling to Samuel and gave Samuel good counsel in how he ought to respond to the Lord.

As we consider that counsel recorded in our text let us learn --

II. The Desired Response to the Lord’s Call.

1 Samuel 3:8b-10 Then Eli perceived that the LORD had called the boy. ⁹Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, ‘Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears.’ ” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰Now the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel answered, “Speak, for Your servant hears.”

Despite Eli’s weakness in regard to disciplining his sons, he gave good solid counsel to Samuel. Eli perceived that it was the Lord calling Samuel, and he encouraged Samuel to respond positively to the Lord. When the Lord again called Samuel’s name it was an even more powerful demonstration of God’s grace. With the previous calling of Samuel’s name, we are told of only a voice that Samuel heard which led him to run to Eli. This final time our text

reports that “*the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’*” (v.10) Samuel was now before the presence of the Lord.

This was a powerful and effective calling of Samuel. The response desired by the Lord was also worked by the Lord. “*Samuel answered, ‘Speak, for Your servant hears.’*” (v.10) Samuel was ready to listen to all the Lord had to say to him. This was a revelation of God’s plan for the future, as well as an indication of God’s will for the life of Samuel. Samuel listened. Samuel obeyed. This was the beginning of Samuel’s life of service to the Lord. It was a full life. He served as the Lord’s prophet, but also as a ruling judge for Israel, and in the special circumstances of Samuel’s life he served as priest. It was a full life of service that began with that call when he was still a boy. This was not Samuel’s call to faith. Samuel already believed in the Lord. This was Samuel’s call to serve. Samuel gave the Lord the desired response even as the Lord worked that response in Samuel’s heart.

“*Speak, for your servant hears!*” (v.10) What can we learn from this?

Very much indeed! While there are many differences between Samuel’s calling and life experience and ours there are also many parallels. We also are believers who have been called to faith by the power of the Spirit working through the Word. As such we are also not only children of God, but servants of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. As we were reminded in our epistle lesson, “*we are not our own for we were bought at a price!* (1 Corinthians 6:20) That is the first important parallel for us to remember. We are servants of God, no matter what we do for a living. The Lord has called us, not with the same direct and special calling Samuel received, but He has called us nonetheless. He has entrusted His message to us that we might share with the world the revelation of Jesus’ gospel we have received. Now again, Samuel was called to be a prophet who received direct messages from God that he was to deliver; God speaks to us through His Word! It is the message of God’s Word which we know to be infallible and inerrant that we have to share with the world.

We talked earlier about how the Word of God is rare today and that the revelation of God in His Word is not respected in the world or by the people of this world. That doesn’t make it any less

authoritative or true. It makes our calling to be Christ's witnesses to the world even more important. We have the truth of salvation in the gospel in this message which the Lord has entrusted to us, and which the Lord has called us to spread in this world. This is a powerful message; "*it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.*" (Romans 1:16)

Are we ready with that desired response the Lord is waiting to hear from us? Have we opened our hearts and lives first to the message, "Speak, for your servant hears," and then to follow through with the direction and purpose the Lord has given us for our spiritual lives here on earth?

The focus of our worship in this Epiphany season is the manifestation of the glory of Christ to the world, to the **world!** With eyes of faith we have seen the glory of the Lord, and now the Lord has called us to reveal His truth to the world that others also might see the glory of Jesus and know the grace of God for life and salvation.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.