

**Sermon for FPC Gardena – Sunday January 15, 2012**  
***1 Samuel 3:1-20***

Samuel was a child born of prayer, his life dedicated to the service of God even before he was conceived.

We all remember Hannah—the barren, yet favored, of Elkanah’s two wives. The other wife, Peninnah, had several children by Elkanah, and she used to taunt Hannah due to her lack of fertility. This caused additional pain during the family’s annual trek to the temple at Shiloh. Hannah would become so sad that she couldn’t even eat.

As the years went by, Hannah longed more and more to bear a child. One day during one of these journeys to the temple, she stood on the steps of the Temple at Shiloh, weeping before the Lord in prayer, asking for a son, promising that she would dedicate that child to the Lord, as a nazirite for all of his life. Hannah was praying so fervently that the priest, Eli, who was observing from a distance accused her of being drunk.

When Eli spoke to her, Hannah explained her petition to God. Upon hearing her story, Eli gave her a blessing, and sent her forth in peace. Hannah did conceive and bear a son, whom she named Samuel. Once the child was weaned, Hannah took him to Shiloh and left him at the temple under the care of Eli.

**And this is where today's story begins. Listen, now, for God's word for you.....**

### **1 Samuel 3:1-20**

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. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; 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. Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" 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. 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." Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. 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. 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. Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." 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. On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. 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. Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering forever." 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. But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." He said, "Here I am." 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." 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." As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the LORD.

**This past fall, we spent a lot of time wandering with Moses and the Israelite people as they made their way from Egypt to Canaan. The time of Moses was a time when God appeared in visions and spoke directly to servants such as Moses.**

**But once they reached the Promised Land, while God remained with the Hebrew people, the methods of communication between the people and the Divine had changed. The political landscape had altered as well. For some time, it was a series of judges who were appointed to guide the Israelites through times of war and peace as they moved into Canaan.**

**But now, as we come to the story of Samuel, times and circumstances are once again on the brink of change, for Samuel would be the last judge of Israel. There is some fascinating information in today's passage which can very easily be missed because it is imbedded in the larger story. It tells us that in the days of Hannah and Samuel, words from the Lord were rare, and that visions with messages from God were not widespread.**

**Even Eli the priest was not accustomed to hearing the voice of God directly. And so, on the night when Samuel was awakened by the sound of his own name, he assumed that it was Eli calling to him, and went to his mentor. The first two times this happened, Eli basically said, 'It wasn't me, go back to bed!'"**

**When Samuel awakened him for the third time, Eli realized what was happening. Samuel had never heard the voice of the Lord, yet as he lay sleeping in the temple which housed the ark of God, Samuel kept hearing this persistent voice calling, “Samuel, Samuel”. On that third time, Eli instructed Samuel to return to where he had been sleeping, and should he hear the voice again, to respond, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” And indeed, this is exactly what happened.**

**When Samuel spoke the words as Eli had instructed him, the Lord then shared the message with young Samuel, that God was planning, yet again, to do a new thing in Israel. God said that, both the ears of anyone who heard of it would tingle. Whatever was about to happen, it was going to be big and different.**

**God revealed to Samuel the plan to destroy the house and family of Eli because of the evils they had done, and their infidelity to God. Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, served as priests—but they also blasphemed God. And Eli, as their father, had not restrained them from such behavior. God told Samuel that all of these would die, and that the ancestors of Eli would have no honor, and that any descendants would not have long lives.**

**No matter how Eli had handled his own sons, he had done right by Samuel, and Samuel was disturbed and frightened by what he had heard from the Lord. 3**

**The next morning, when Eli asked Samuel to share what the Lord had said to him, Samuel was naturally reluctant to repeat it to Eli. But Eli said that it was the word of God and that Samuel need not fear speaking it aloud. And so Samuel told Eli what had been said, and Eli took it as the word of the Lord.**

**All of this took place while Samuel was still a lad. But, as he grew, he gained maturity and faith and wisdom. The Lord continued to appear to Samuel at Shiloh, and God remained with Samuel who took to heart all of God's words to him. Samuel became widely known as a prophet of the Lord who could be trusted in all ways. And God saw that Samuel's voice was heard throughout the land.**

**From the very beginning, Samuel's path in life was unique. Born to a barren, yet prayerful mother; dedicated to the Lord before birth; left as a toddler to grow up in the temple of God; only seeing his family once a year when they came to Shiloh to make their annual sacrifice. He was chosen by God, spoken to by God, became a prophet of God and one of God's judges in Israel---all to bring about change.**

**But what if.....what if Samuel had chosen to go back to sleep on that important night, dismissing Eli's instructions, and missing out on God's call to him? What if Samuel had chosen not to respond to God saying, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening?"---thus missing the chance to say, "Here I am." Page 4**

God's spoken word and visions are even less prevalent today than they were in the days of Samuel. Were *we* to tell anyone that we had heard the voice of God telling us to go out and prophesy, or to engage in some other sort of work to the glory of God—there is no doubt that we would be met with skepticism or even ridicule.

Yet just because God speaks through other means today, does not mean that God is not reaching out to us, calling us to special missions and ministries, offering guidance for our lives. Think of the words that would someday be spoken through the prophet Jeremiah – “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” God and Jeremiah were speaking those words specifically to the exiles in Babylon, yet they apply just as surely to our relationships with God today. God has our best interests at heart.

And still God calls. We may hear God's voice or call in a variety of ways--a quiet whisper, persistent in our minds; a gentle tug at our hearts; a sensation in our gut that just can't be ignored; words of wisdom and guidance from another person; a message or opportunity that continues to pop up in our lives, demanding our attention. The ways that God calls or speaks to us may equal to the number of people in God's world.

**God called Samuel---and so many others after him—from David to Mary to Paul. Surely God is or will be calling out to us as well. These callings may be different at various ages and stages of our lives. But it is important that we listen and respond. This early part of Samuel’s life provides us with a number of ways through which we can discover God’s call in our own lives...**

**Coming full circle, we recall that Samuel’s birth was a result of prayer—deep, fervent prayer. A prayer from deep in Hannah’s heart, a prayer that included tears and trust, a prayer that helped set the course for Samuel’s life. We, too, must cultivate the practice of regular, deep, and honest prayer in our lives.**

**Remember, also, that Samuel did not recognize the voice of God calling his name. It even took Eli a while to realize what was happening. This is another way through which we can hear God’s voice in our lives—by working with another person of faith to discern that the call that is being heard is truly of God.**

**And Samuel was obedient to God, serving God alone throughout his life.**

**Which leaves us with our own question to ponder: Like Samuel, are we ready to say, “Here I am,” and respond to God’s call with faith and trust? Amen. Page 6**