



The Nourishing Vocation Project
Engaging the Living Word
1 Samuel 3:1-10

What is this particular text?

- Call Story
- Narrative within the historical books
- A Beginning

How does the text function within the scriptural story?

- Establishes Samuel as called by God
- Marks the beginning of the transition in Israel's history from judges to kings
- Echoes the call story of Moses, prefigures the call stories of the later prophets
- Samuel is only one in a long line of people God calls at specific times and places throughout the scriptural story

How can this text function in the church today?

- God calls without regard to age or status
- We do not always recognize God's voice
- God's call is more easily discerned in community
- We can teach one another to hear God's voice and to respond
- Listening is a necessary part of prayer—is that part of our worship?
- To whom do we listen—whose voices do we often ignore?

What does the text do to you? How do you react to the text? What feelings does this text engender in you?

- Fear—being called is scary; Samuel thought he heard a more familiar voice, I would rather stick to what I know than hear something new
- Genuine surprise that Samuel was willing to listen to whatever God had to say
- There is wonder and joy that God knows all of our names
- Uncertainty—I do not feel I could have answered as simply and unwaveringly as Samuel did with no hint about what message might be coming

What do you have to say to the text?

- Hearing God's voice, discerning the voice to be God, and responding is NEVER this simple in real life.
- Samuel is young—there is no reason to believe he will be listened to when he says that God talked to him.
- Eli did not have to help Samuel recognize God's voice, I am glad that he chose to do so.
- I also find it ironic that Samuel has grown up in the temple, and is laying in the temple where the ark of God was (the holiest place!) and that Eli himself is a priest who has also been in the temple for many years, and yet it still takes both of them several times before they recognize God's voice!

What do you see through this text from the story itself?

- God calling one of God’s people by name for a specific purpose
- Faithful listening as a response to God’s call
- Eli and Samuel must discern together that it is God calling
- Samuel relies on Eli to model how to respond to God

What do you see from within your church/community/world? (2022)

- Unwillingness to believe that God might be calling certain people
- There are SO MANY voices calling to us today, and every voice demands urgency; as the church we struggle to discern which voices are God’s or are from God
- The world has access to a lot of information and we struggle to discern fact from fiction in the information that we consume
- The instinct to only listen to familiar voices, or voices that tell us what we want to hear
- Ageism—Samuel was willing to learn from Eli and Eli was willing to help Samuel—our communities do not often model this
- Crises of today:
 - Discerning truth in the midst of an overload of constant information
 - Hostility between generations
 - The exclusion of some voices because of race, class, gender, or sexual orientation/identity

What do you see within yourself?

- I would rather only hear familiar voices
- My temptation in prayer is to do most of the talking
- Fear of being called to an unknown future or to speak a difficult truth
- A cherishing of the wisdom of those who have heard God’s call before me and faithfully listened and responded

What is the context – textual and historical?

- Follows the story of Hannah, her barrenness, and Samuel’s birth
- Immediately following is the message God actually gives Samuel—that the behavior of Eli’s sons will bring destruction; in the next chapter the “Ark of God” is captured by the Philistines.
- So far in the historical books, Israel has only had judges, Samuel plays a key role in the transition to kings, his story and particularly his call in this passage and God’s message to him mark the beginning of this transition, God is starting something new.

What questions does this text raise for you?

- Was Eli jealous that God was speaking to Samuel and not him?
- Did Eli perhaps have an idea already of the message that was coming?
- Did Samuel’s voice tremble when he said, “Speak Lord, your servant is listening” or was he able to speak boldly?
- How did Eli come to the conclusion that it was God calling Samuel? Had God spoken to Eli in this manner before?
- How do we know if a voice is coming from God or not?
- What voices are we willing to listen to?
- Was Samuel tempted to ignore Eli’s advice and simply go back to bed?

What words/themes seem of particular importance?

- Called
- Speak
- Perceived
- Listening

What is the Gospel / transforming Good News within this text?

- God knows our names and calls us by name
- God is persistent in calling when we do not hear the first time
- Communities are places where people can hear God's call and help one another discern it
- God calls without regard to worldly standards
- God's voice may come to us from a surprising place

What is the as-over-againstness of this text?

- The part that is left out—Samuel is ultimately given a very difficult message from God to tell to Eli. We do not always like to hear difficult truths.
- It took three tries for them to realize God was calling—and they were right in the midst of the temple at Shiloh! How can we be expected to hear God today?
- Not everyone who says God called them or spoke to them is telling the truth
- Even when there is no denying that God is calling us, we do not always want to listen!
- We tend to reject the modern day "Samuels" in our midsts
- We feel inadequate when God calls us or think that God really ought to call someone else

Who does this text say that Jesus is, or if not Jesus, then who does this text say that God is? What does this text say about God?

- God is always up to something and wants us to participate in it
- God looks for ways for us to use our gifts
- God is present with us when we are called and sent
- God chooses to call and send those without power or authority
- God is patient and persistent

What have others said about this text?

- ["And though the word had been rare"](#) ("precious," is the old English word of the King James Version), Eli knew at least how to attend to that voice. "Speak, for your servant is listening." And, sure enough, the voice of God called "as before" (verse 10). God's persistence and Eli's mentoring work hand in hand. Though no ordinary, off-the-street person, Eli's role in Samuel's calling does remind us that we learn how to discern God's voice and call in proximity to people who have come before us. They help attune our ears and heart to hear from God. Who mentors us to listen for the voice, what Howard Thurman called "the sound of the genuine" that's in all of us? How do we prepare to hear it completely in order to respond to it fully? Who are the Elis in our lives?" by Valerie Bridgeman
- ["Answering God's call is the work of community"](#), old and young together, to bring about the revolution God has in store. For the people of God in 1 Samuel, God is ushering in a new age, a new way of being in the world, a new way of leading God's people. And it all starts with the courage a young boy and an old priest have to wake up, and pay attention." by Rev. Elizabeth Lovell Milford

What will I teach or proclaim?

- Even when we feel inadequate, not old enough, not good enough, or not knowledgeable enough, God calls us and equips us
- We truly need other people to help us hear God's call; who are the Eli's in your faith community?
- What does God's voice sound like today? Where and who does it come from?
- We hear so many voices—it takes intentional work to discern which come from God
- Communities can help nurture the call in individuals—who are the Samuel's in your faith community?
- God calls unlikely people—we can be tempted to reject those God has called to tell us the truth
- God calls us again and again so it's okay if we do not hear or recognize God the first time or even the second or third!
- It takes actual listening to hear God's call, both listening as a community and as individuals. Listening is a necessary part of prayer.
- It can be difficult to "turn off" all the other voices that demand our attention in 2023 in order to set aside time for intentional listening in prayer. How can/does your community model intentional listening?
- This text ends without hearing God's message to Samuel—which gives us the freedom to think about and imagine what God might tell you, your community, or our world today.
- God is always with us after God calls us and sends us out with something to do or proclaim!