

HEARING THE CALL OF GOD

Stuart Mennigke - 19th January 2003

1 Samuel 3.1-20, John 1.35-42

Samuel is important in the Old Testament story – because he is the John the Baptist or the forerunner of the establishment of the kingship, the monarchy, in Israel. This is important because the monarchy is the depiction of how God ruled in Israel. This is how God was present to rule his people. Samuel is the last of the judges, and prepares the way for freedom from the yoke of the Philistines – he is the prophet who anoints Israel's first two kings – Saul and David, and David is the one who is the ancestor of Jesus, the Saviour. So, he anoints – sets apart, makes ready for the future freedom of humankind in Jesus. The author of the book of Samuel doesn't describe the births of say, Saul and David - important as they are - but he does describe that of Samuel – and then his early life and calling.

You'll recall that Samuel (from the Hebrew 'Shem-El', 'the name of God') is born after childless Hannah pleads with God for a son in the temple. *I call him the name of God, she said, because I asked God for him.* And then she gives him to God forever – and he goes to the temple to live and serve God with Eli the priest.

So, Samuel is important - because he is part of the story of how God fulfils his faithfulness, and the whole of scripture is the story that God is faithful. Faithful to history,

faithful to his own nature,

faithful to you and me.

In that sense, every sermon is about God's faithfulness – every one points to “God loves you and me” and is desperate to show that. Here it is shown through Samuel's life and his calling.

So, there are some important things to see from Samuel's calling.

1) **The story is very natural.** It is everyday. A woman is childless. She wants a child. She pleads with God, God hears her. She has a son, gives him to God ...God uses the child to achieve a purpose to show that God is the giver and is faithful. We tend to think that it's only the 'special people' who God calls. Not true – this is an ordinary woman and an ordinary child – with an ordinary story. Hannah is you, your neighbour. She is the woman of Africa. *Mamphela Ramphela* in her new book “*Steering by the Stars*” talks about the women of Africa and their resilience who have heard, seen and experienced pain and anguish, but kept hoping for a better tomorrow...(pg 11). So, you (these women of Africa) maybe your domestic worker..... give birth to the Samuels of now. The ones who will plead with God for blessing and give the blessing over to God. And it's in the last few years that we've heard the stories of women in Africa whose resilience has shown God's faithfulness. We are the natural people. God calls...Do you believe that? Now is the time when God uses us in our ordinary jobs and places - lives to be his truth - his light in a dark

world. I need to believe I am that one...natural me...baptized into Christ..."*Shine as a light in the world, to the glory of God...*we say to these baptized ones.

2) **God does the calling.** It is God's initiative. And it's Samuel's uninitiated ears that think it is Eli. Uninitiated, in that, though he is given to God and in the Lord's house, he is young, and hasn't learned the ways of the Lord. But God calls him to the work of the future. Life today – and especially in South Africa seems to make lots of calls. Job calls, family calls – it could be that we hear calls to leave for another place. There are – if we have the option – any number of places better than to be here ... we think. Sometimes we know what motivates the calls we hear – sometimes we move without hearing the call. But it could be that we're called to live out a life that may become difficult right here and make something possible for the future. Samuel didn't do anything obviously brilliant. He wasn't the king – but he made something possible in a future generation. It could be the child you're helping educate, or the 'Hannah' whose house you help build because we have the access to means, the wealth...the way... And of course...

3) **God calls him by his name - "Samuel".** God knows who we are. The psalmist in Psalm 139 has those lovely words: "*You created me in my inmost self, knitted me together in my mother's womb.*" God knows who God wants to call.

4) **He is in the place of the Lord.** He is in the environment which is conducive to hearing the Lord. Now, that is not necessarily the "church" or the temple of the Lord and the holy of Holies – but it's in the place where one is used to being able to hear. Or, being in the space, where one can hear God speak. That space is created by being in it often. It is an attitude of listening. A very discerning friend said to me last week that often we remove ourselves from the place of listening to God because we are disillusioned with God. God hasn't fixed the thing we needed. God hasn't heard our prayer – or we are disillusioned with someone who has hurt us – and so turn away from being with God regularly because that space reminds us of God who lets us down in so and so...It's different for you and me – but often the theme is there ...we leave the space of listening and so cannot hear clearly.

The gospel story is the way back isn't it? *Where do you live? they ask Jesus. Come and see...he says. And they stayed with him that day.*

Sometimes we need just that 'day' once in a while – or we need it again – to revive the place of listening...the attitude of it...to hear the calls we need to move on.