

# Written Copy: 1 Samuel 3:8-10 "When the LORD Comes and Calls"

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday @ Epiphany

Sunday, January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021

## Text: 1 Samuel 3:8-10

<sup>8</sup> And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the young man. <sup>9</sup> Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. <sup>10</sup> And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears."

## Exegetical Statement

Samuel who had been dedicated to service in the LORD's tabernacle since his birth is serving as an apprentice to Eli the Chief Priest. Samuel does custodial work and helps Eli with that which he cannot do because his eyesight is failing. Samuel sleeps in the Holy Place and is in charge of keeping the lamp that stands before the LORD lit throughout the night. He does this because Eli's sons are no good and not to be trusted. They serve themselves and act with great evil instead of serving the LORD in holiness. One night Samuel hears his name called three separate times. In his mind this must be Eli and so the first time he runs and reports his presence to Eli. But Eli had not called, and he rather abruptly sends Samuel back to bed. The second time Samuel hears his name called he doesn't run but reports to Eli. This time Eli regards Samuel tenderly in his apparent confusion and tells him to go back and lie down. After the third time this occurs Eli understands that it is the LORD who is calling Samuel. While Samuel knows about the LORD, he has yet to hear His word and have an intimate relationship with Him. Eli informs him how to move forward by answering the LORD the next time He calls as a humble servant ready to hear His word. The LORD comes and stands in the room with Samuel and calls him. When Samuel answers "Speak LORD for your servant is listening" the LORD calls Samuel into the office of prophet by giving Him a prophetic message for Eli. This is a message of condemnation for Eli and his sons, and one that announces they will not be forgiven of their sins committed as corrupt priests before he LORD. And Eli is rebuked for not stopping them as Chief Priests. The manner in which the LORD will punish them will be fearful and dreadful news to all of Israel (as the two sons will carry the Ark into battle against the Philistines and it will be captured, and they along with 30,000 Israeli soldiers will die). Samuel does not want to tell Eli the LORD's prophecy, but Eli strongly encourages him to, telling him punishment just as severe will fall on Samuel if he holds anything back. When Samuel tells Eli all that he heard Eli responds resigning himself to the LORD's will saying that "He is the LORD and will do what He sees as best" Samuel grows up and grows in His relationship with the LORD who remains with Him and continues to share His word with Him. Samuel becomes known throughout Israel as a trustworthy faithful prophet of the LORD in contrast to Eli and his sons.

## Focus Statement:

Just as with Nathanael Jesus knows us from the beginning, even before we knew Him. He seeks us out and sends His Spirit to work on us and in us through God's Word. He comes to us and draws us into an intimate relationship with Jesus our Savior, who makes us His temple and calls us into His service as one who has redeemed us from the devil's kingdom to serve Him in His. When we refuse to be servants of His word He points to our sinfulness and through Confession and Absolution cleans the sin from His temple within us to serve Him again.

## Function Statement:

### Why it's important to know:

The LORD calls us to faith so that we too can be His voice to those around us. Like Samuel sometimes we are called to share messages of judgment and law that are not what people want to hear. Sometimes we serve ourselves by keeping quiet. Other times we abuse our place as speakers of God's truth to convict those whom we disagree with politically at the expense of being God's spokesman of law and Gospel.

### What the hearer should do as a result:

Use those relationships we have with those outside of the Church not to push our political or personal agenda, but to be the Spirit's means to call them into a relationship with Christ through His Word of law and Gospel.

## Subject Sentence: Called to be His witness to the world

## **Introduction: Unpleasant Conversations**

When the phone rang, I almost didn't answer it. I didn't recognize the number, but it was a local number. It was a Sunday afternoon back in my days at the Seminary. I was behind in finishing a paper that was due the next day. I had set aside working on it because it was my turn to preach at my field work Church in St. Louis. But I did answer it. I was somehow moved to answer it even though part of me didn't want to. It was a gentleman who had talked to me on the way out of service earlier. He was a familiar face, but not a regular attendee. He had asked for my cell phone number, mentioning he wanted to discuss some of the things from my sermon that got him to thinking. So I wrote my cell number on his bulletin. Now hearing his voice it flashed across my mind that maybe sharing my number had not been such a good idea.

He said he had been thinking about some of the things I had preached about and wanted to set me straight. He said he realized I was still learning about the faith and wanted to help me along. I stifled the urge to defend myself as one who had 3 years of theological study under his belt, including a vicarage, and instead let him talk. And he did. Almost non-stop for 10 minutes. He said I focus way too much on how people are sinners. He told me that I'm not the only one, that the Pastor of my field work church speaks the same way. He said it turns people off, and its not correct. He said he used to come to the Lutheran Church all the time and leave wallowing in his sins, seeing himself as not good enough. Then he visited another church in the area. They didn't begin the service with a Confession of Sins, they began with uplifting praise music. He said that the Pastor at his new Church didn't pound on people about their sins, instead he focused on how they were a new creation in Jesus, free from sin, and how they should live that way. Then he would actually spend a lot of time telling them how to make that the reality in their life and what they needed to do to live a new life, one that pleases God and earns His favor. He said he came today knowing I was preaching and hoped my message would be different from the normal, but in his eyes, sadly that was not the case.

Then he paused and asked me what I thought about this. I suppressed some of the more negative comments that had popped into my mind. I looked down at a scrap piece of paper where I had jotted some quick notes and asked him what he thought Paul was saying in **Romans 3:23-24** <sup>23</sup> **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,** <sup>24</sup> **and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,** He said that was Paul talking about the old life before Christ, not the new life. I commented "Wasn't he speaking to those who were now members of the Church, not unbelievers but believers? Wasn't he telling them that they are pleasing to God not by what they do, but by what Christ has done for them and given to them?" He became very angry saying "See, there you go! Giving excuses instead of doing the hard work of living the perfect life God calls you to live. Didn't Jesus say in **Matthew 5:48** **"You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect?"** Why would Jesus say that if we couldn't do it? I am so fed up with you

ignoring the clear message of Jesus, while knocking others down just to build yourself up!" He said some other unkind things, which would be wrong to repeat in a house of worship.

And while he was rambling on I turned to and read him a passage a little bit further on in Matthew from where he had quoted. **Matthew 5:21-22** <sup>21</sup>"**You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'** <sup>22</sup>**But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.**" He responded with a string of expletives and hung up. I waited until I had calmed down and thought about calling him back, but I never did. I remember struggling to get back on track writing the paper. I felt like I had been soiled in some way. And I felt guilty for saying things that turned this man away from the faith instead of encouraging him. I began to wonder if his critique had some merit; perhaps I had focused too much on the sin and not enough on the gifts of the Savior. Perhaps I did need to be more encouraging and not so convicting. Perhaps I was just wrong.

Have you ever had the chance to share your faith with someone who either doesn't believe at all, or holds beliefs that are different from ours? Perhaps you know someone whose lifestyle doesn't live up to what the Bible declares as sinful, yet they claim it is not a problem because Jesus is all about love and forgiveness instead of condemnation. Perhaps there is someone in your life who you would like to have a frank discussion with about why we spend time meditating on and confessing our sins, instead of dismissing them because Jesus has done away with them. This phone call came to mind as I studied our Scripture reading for today, especially the message the LORD told Samuel to give Eli, as well as the initial response of Nathanael when he heard about Jesus.

## **Samuel's Call to Ministry and the Message He Must Give**

In our Old Testament Lesson Samuel is working for Eli in the tabernacle as a kind of apprentice, even though he is only a young boy. His mother had brought him to serve at the tabernacle in response to a promise she made. She was unable to conceive and have children. She promised the LORD that if He opened her womb, she would dedicate the child to serving the LORD in His house. So it was that when Samuel was about age 3 or 4 she entrusted him to the care of the Chief Priest Eli to serve at the tabernacle. And she visited him faithfully every year and brought him the gift of a new coat and cloak that was similar to what the priests wore.

One of Samuel's responsibilities was to make sure the lamp that burned in the Holy Place of the Tabernacle remained lit throughout the night. So that was where he slept. One night, three separate times, Samuel heard a voice call his name. In his mind it could only be Eli calling him and so he presented himself to the priest. Each time the priest told Samuel he had not called and to go back and lay down.

We are told as an aside that, while Samuel knew **about** the LORD, he **did not know** the Lord. In other words he didn't have a personal faith relationship with the LORD as his god. How could this be since he lived and worked with the Chief Priest in the Tabernacle where God was to be worshiped? We are told that at this time in the history of the nation of Israel the Word of the LORD was rare, and prophetic messages were few and far between. Perhaps this was because Eli was not the faithful Chief Priest that he should've been. His major failure was with his sons. They were scoundrels. Instead of faithfully serving the LORD as priests they served themselves and their own appetites. They did wicked things: stealing portions of the sacrificial meat that should've been given to the LORD or given back to the person who brought it. They had sex with the women who served at the entrance to the tabernacle. The LORD had sent a prophet to rebuke Eli for knowingly allowing his sons to behave in this way and not stopping them. And even after the prophet's visit, when Eli confronted them with their wickedness, he did not listen and he did not remove them from their corrupt service. They had made the Tabernacle a place void of God's presence and testimony until now.

After the third occurrence Eli realized that the voice calling Samuel was the LORD God Himself. He instructed Samuel what to say. And when the LORD Himself came and stood in the Holy Place, Samuel responded to His call by saying with the attitude of humble service: "Speak Lord, for your servant hears."

## **The LORD's Call to You and Me**

The LORD had to come to Samuel to personally call him. The LORD had to be the one to make contact with Samuel and invite Him into a relationship with Him. The same is true for you and me. Even if we grew up in a household where our parents taught us about who Jesus is, even if they took us to Sunday School and worship service, that would only assure that we know about Jesus. That we know all the stories, and even know about His death and resurrection. But that does not mean I know Him as **my** Lord and Savior. We can know all these things, and yet not believe in Him.

Just as with Samuel the LORD came and stood before you one day in your past. He came to many of us in our baptism. The Holy Spirit came and made entrance into your heart and mind and began sharing God's Word with you so that you not only know who Jesus is, but who He is to you and for you. He came to call you to faith by impressing upon you that you are not perfect but disobey God on a regular basis. He came to impress upon you that left to yourself you would live a life apart from Him now and eternally. That's when He brought Jesus and His life, death, and resurrection before your eyes. He made you see that Jesus suffering and death was in your place. He made you to know that Jesus died taking your punishment for your sin. He made you see that now Jesus' resurrection is your future; just as He rose from death never to die again so will you.

In the meantime He has come to live with you and in you. Like Samuel He has called you not only to faith, but to a life of service. As Paul describes in **1 Corinthians 6:19-20** <sup>19</sup> **Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,** <sup>20</sup> **for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.** The Holy Spirit comes upon you to make His home within you. You become the temple of God's Spirit on earth and like Samuel you are serving at the temple of God. Your call to faith becomes a call to serve, the call to glorify the LORD in your body. And we as believers in Christ do that by setting aside time to read and study His Word, to worship Him and commune with Him in the Sacrament, and then glorify Him as we be His mouthpiece to those around us who need to know Him. And as we do that we receive encouragement and strengthening of faith from Him.

Sometimes that means sharing a message that we would rather not say. Can you imagine how Samuel felt sharing God's message of law and condemnation with Eli? How it felt to tell this man who took him in, cared for him, raised him, that the LORD was going to punish his family, and that there would be no forgiveness for them no matter what sacrifice he might make? Can you imagine what it was like for Samuel to tell Eli that his sons had grieved the Holy Spirit so much that He was removing the offer of grace from their lives?

We too are called to share words of law and judgment with those we see living apart from faith in Christ. Those who have defined their own ideas of what is truth and what pleases God, fooling themselves and being fooled into thinking that what pleases them and what they desire in life is the same as what God desires. Allowing themselves to be so fooled that they turn a blind eye and ear to where God's word stands against it. That is a hard message to share. And will often cause a very negative reaction in those that we are called to share it with. They may accuse us of being hypocrites since in their minds we are accusing them of living in sin when we are no different, that since we do and say things in our lives that are sinful and disobedient to God who then are we to judge them?

Those words can hurt. Those words can make us wonder if they aren't right in what they say. We see the sin in our lives. We know that we continue to disobey. So we too may wonder "Who are we to judge?" Except that as Christians we judge not from our own thoughts, ideas, and desires. We judge according to the truth of God's Word that declares what truly pleases Him and what does not, what is sinful and what is good, right, and salutary, what is holy in His eyes. And we who have been made a temple of the Holy Spirit work with Him to clean out all the sinful garbage from within us. We come before Him and admit that our temple is not as clean as it should be. We recognize from His Words of truth that we live at times to please ourselves instead of Him, that we disobey His call to serve Him alone by refusing to speak His words of truth out of fear of rebuke or the angry response. We confess these things, and then through the faith that the Holy Spirit gives we cling to the truth of the Gospel, the truth of the Absolution. Because all of our disobedient sin has been washed to the cross, our temple is constantly washed clean. We stand before the LORD not perfect in our own right, but made perfect through our intimate faith

relationship with Jesus. We can confess with those who call us hypocrites that “Yes, I too am a sinner”. But I know I am forgiven in Christ and I empowered by His forgiveness to look to His Word as my guide to living a more pleasing life in His sight. I do this not by turning a blind eye to sin, but turning away from it, repenting of it, and living in the wonderful forgiveness that flows to me in my baptism daily.

## **Nathanael and His Reaction to Hearing About Jesus**

And what about those who lash out at our faith and our Savior? I am reminded of the conversation Philip had with his friend Nathanael in our Gospel Lesson. **John 1:45-46** <sup>45</sup> **Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."** <sup>46</sup> **Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."** Philip excitedly shared with his friend what the Holy Spirit had revealed to him about Jesus, that he had found the one promised from long ago, the Messiah! And Nathanael's reaction is like a slap in the face toward Philip. “You think you found the Savior in someone from that hick town of Nazareth? Can anything or anyone good come from there?” Philip could've lashed out at Nathanael for his closed mindedness. But instead He lets Jesus defend Himself. He simply invites Nathanael to “Come and see”. Perhaps it would help us in those times of difficult witness to remember that it's not our job to change hearts and minds, but simply to share God's Word: to share both words of law and words of Gospel. To show people how both they and we need Jesus, and then give our testimony to how He has lifted us up, cleaned us off, and made us precious children of the Heavenly Father through our faith relationship with Him

## **Conclusion**

You and I sit here today because the LORD came to us and called us to faith. He called us to be the temple of His Spirit. He called us to be His voice to each other and those around us. Sometimes He calls us to share words with those who may not want to hear them. But our purpose is never to make ourselves look good, or even vindicate our honor. We do this because the Spirit can use us to prevent that person from a life lived apart from God now and into eternity. He calls us to be His witness to prevent others from grieving the Holy Spirit with a life lived pleasing themselves while thinking they are pleasing God. We have those hard conversations not to engage in angry responses, but in love, always hoping that these hard conversations open the door to sharing the Gospel. And when they lash out at our faith and our Savior, we don't lash back in return, but look for any way we can invite them to “Come and see”.

I never did talk with this man after he hung up on me. But I've prayed for him. I texted him some verses that came to mind after meditating on what the LORD really has to say about his life and his direction. He didn't respond back. But my prayer is that he one day take to heart what the Apostle John says to all of us. **1 John 1:8-9** <sup>8</sup> **If we say we have no sin, we**

**deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.** The LORD reveals my sinful garbage that I've brought into His temple, and then by the words of Absolution shows me that He has thrown that garbage out by throwing it to the cross. He makes me to know that by the power of Christ's resurrection my heart is being made a brand new constantly. This is the work that the Spirit is doing in me. This is the work I pray the Spirit would do with the man on the phone. This is the work the Spirit is doing in all of us, as He calls us to be His faithful witnesses to those around us. Amen.