

Rev. Zach Moffatt
Adams UMC
23rd Sunday after Pentecost
November 17th, 2019

First Taste: Samuel

1 Samuel 3:1-21

Focus: Do we know God?

Function: The function of this sermon is ask the tough question about if we know God or if we only think we know God.

Will you pray with me and for me: Holy One, we are your people. Make yourself known in our lives in a mighty and powerful way. Move us and shake us with your divine presence. Awaken our hearts and minds so we may deepen our relationship with you. May the meditations of our hearts and the words my lips be acceptable and pleasing in thy sight, oh God, our strength and our redeemer. Speak, Lord Jesus, for your servants are listening.

IN THE NAME OF THE CREATOR, AND OF THE REDEEMER, AND OF THE SUSTAINER, AMEN.

Well friends, we are approaching the ending of our *First Taste* sermon series.

Throughout these past few months we have looked at some classics like: Adam and Eve, Daniel and the Lion's Den, and Psalm 23. We've also covered some stories that aren't as well known like Ruth the Moabite and Sara laughing. Today, we look at another story that is known, but isn't on the same level of as Jonah or David and Bathsheba. Many of us have heard of Samuel—the prophet of Israel who led Israel through the transition from a confederation of tribes to a united kingdom. Samuel, the one who anointed King Saul and who anointed King David when he was a boy. And, while we may not know the story of Samuel's call like we know some of the other stories we've covered—parts of it are familiar.

Our story this morning begins very interestingly. Samuel, the son of a barren woman named Hannah, is serving the Lord under Eli—who is the current high priest and prophet for Israel. Now, Eli's sons were rascals. They did what was right in their own eyes. They were filled with corruption. Charging more than they needed for temple tax. Taking advantage of the poor and the marginalized. Abusing their power as priests and religious leaders. The timing of Samuel takes place during the time of the Judges. If you've never read Judges, I encourage you to. It's a difficult read as the material is violent and scary at times. But, it details to us the spiraling of society when they do what is right in their own eyes. In other words, when they don't have a relationship with God. Our story tells us this is what is going on. The beginnings of our story states, "The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread."

As our story progresses, we hear about a somewhat comical encounter between Samuel and Eli and God. Samuel has spent his entire life with Eli and learning what it means to work in the Temple. In other words, he has spent his entire life learning how he is to serve God.

He has spent his entire life under the tutelage of Eli—Israel’s high priest. And one night, Samuel goes to bed and he hears his name, “Samuel! Samuel!” Samuel runs to Eli, thinking it was him. But, Eli didn’t call Samuel. So, he goes back to sleep. He hears it again. “Samuel! Samuel!” Again, he runs to Eli, but Eli didn’t call him. This happens a third time. He runs to Eli, but this time Eli understands what is happening. Eli says to Samuel, “It is the Lord calling you. Next time you hear it say, ‘Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.’” So, Samuel does just that. He hears his name and he says, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

While this, at least to me, comes across as a comical, I think there is something to stop and think about here. While this story is used to teach about Samuel and where his calling came from, it can take us a deeper level—a level that might make some of us uncomfortable. Samuel spent his entire life in the temple—dedicated to serving God. And yet, he didn’t know God’s voice when it was literally calling out to him. Let me say that again. Samuel spent his entire life in the temple, dedicated to serving God. And, yet he didn’t know God’s voice when it was literally calling out his name. And, while, some of you may say, “Well preacher, the narrator told us that the word of Lord was rare, that is why.” I want us think about that. Was the word of the Lord really rare? Or did it seem rare because folks weren’t focusing on the word of the Lord, but on their own words, their own thoughts, their own selfish desires?

Every time I read this story, I can’t help but ask the question, “If someone like Samuel who spent his entire day and life in the temple in service to God, but still didn’t know God, do I really know the Lord?” Would I recognize the word of the Lord? Would I recognize God’s voice if it was calling out to me, “Zach! Zach!” Do we know God? Do we truly know God? Would you recognize God’s voice if God was calling out your name in the middle of the night? Perhaps we, like Samuel are sleeping, and do not hear God calling out for us to be God’s voice of love and grace in our time.

Now, this isn’t to shame anybody or guilt anybody. I don’t believe every person hears a literal voice when God speaks. Some of us receive an overwhelming feeling of conviction. Others experience movement or goosebumps. God speaks to some of us in dreams. While God speaks to others through strangers, friends, families, or communities of faith. The point is, would you recognize God if God was speaking to you?

Friends, Samuel’s story tells us that it is not what we do or where we are that builds our relationship with God. Coming to church just because it is “what we are supposed to do” or going to Bible Study or memorizing Scripture because it helps keep up our status in society are not what deepen our relationship with God. Making our lives busy for “the Lord,” again, will not deepen our relationship with God.

And, there is only one thing that will. **If we follow Eli’s advice.** Notice what Eli told Samuel to do. He didn’t tell Samuel to read through thousands of verses of Scripture. He didn’t tell Samuel that he needed to come to Church all the times he could. He didn’t tell Samuel that he needed to sit on a committee, lead the youth group, go on a mission trip, have perfect attendance at church, sing in the choir, or do all the behind the scenes stuff that make church,

church. Don't get me wrong—all of those things are good. But what deepens our relationship with God to where we know and recognize God's voice only happens when we take the word "relationship" seriously. It only happens when we say what Samuel said. It only happens when we listen to Eli's advice. It only happens when we say, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening."

There are many folks who will say they know God. **But, there is only one way which proves we know God on a deep level.** If our lives show it. If we have a deep relationship with God, our lives are transformed. That what relationships do and that is what love does. God's love, God's grace, transforms us and makes us new people. In other words, when we have a relationship with God—to quote James—our faith will produce works. We will live out God's commandments of love, justice, and mercy. We will be people who forgive and seek reconciliation. We will be people who seek to serve instead of be served. We will be people who will see the divine image of God stamped upon every single person we meet—yes, even those who annoy us, even those who don't think like us, even those who don't believe like us, even our enemies. All persons are created in the image of God who is our healer and redeemer.

This story is an amazing story. An amazing story about call, about God using the unexpected people, about God doing unexpected things. God used a blind priest whose sons were going crazy to remind God's new prophet what it takes to build a deep and lasting relationship with God. It takes humility. It takes listening. It takes a longing to want to be in the presence of God's holy and divine love. Do we know God? Even if we don't—even if we wish our relationship was stronger—there is good news. God was waiting for Samuel to respond. God never turned away. God kept pursuing, kept calling, kept reaching. God keeps calling out to us—inviting us to go deeper in our walk and in our journey with God. Sometimes that journey will lead us on a difficult road, like Samuel's—as being a prophet is never easy. God is calling out to us friends. Can we hear him? Are we willing to say, "Speak Lord, for your servants are listening?"

IN THE NAME OF THE CREATOR, AND OF THE REDEEMER, AND OF THE SUSTAINER, AMEN.