

Good morning and welcome to our podcast

We've been reading mainly gospel passages recently

Over the next few weeks we will be reading through the first half of the first book of Samuel.

We continue today with chapter 3.1-21, the story of Samuel hearing God's call

(pause)

Let us pray

Father God, we come to you as your children, known, accepted, valued.

We come to hear you speak to us:

(pause)

Forgive us, Lord God when we ignore you call to us.

When we don't listen to your voice speaking to us.

(pause)

These prayers we bring before you in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord,

who taught us to pray saying

Our Father Who art in Heaven

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation.

But deliver us from evil.

For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory forever. **Amen**

Reading - 1 Samuel 3.1-21 In those days, when the boy Samuel was serving the Lord under the direction of Eli, there were very few messages from the Lord, and visions from him were quite rare. **2** One night Eli, who was now almost blind, was sleeping in his own room;

3 Samuel was sleeping in the sanctuary, where the sacred Covenant Box was. Before dawn, while the lamp was still burning, **4** the Lord called Samuel. He answered, "Yes, sir!" **5** and ran to Eli and said, "You called me, and here I am." But Eli answered, "I didn't call you; go back to bed." So Samuel went back to bed. **6** The Lord called Samuel again. The boy did not know that it was the Lord, because the Lord had never spoken to him before. So he got up, went to Eli, and said, "You called me, and here I am." But Eli answered, "My son, I didn't call you; go back to bed." **8** The Lord called Samuel a third time; he got up, went to Eli, and said, "You called me, and here I am." Then Eli realized that it was the Lord who was calling the boy, **9** so he said to him, "Go back to bed; and if he calls you again, say, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went back to bed. **10** The Lord came and stood there, and called as he had before, "Samuel! Samuel!" Samuel answered, "Speak; your servant is listening." **11** The Lord said to him, "Some day I am going to do something to the people of Israel that is so terrible that everyone who hears about it will be stunned.

12 On that day I will carry out all my threats against Eli's family, from beginning to end. **13** I have already told him that I am going to punish his family forever because his sons have spoken evil things against me. Eli knew they were doing this, but he did not stop them. **14** So I solemnly declare to the family of Eli that no sacrifice or offering will ever be able to remove the consequences of this terrible sin." **15** Samuel stayed in bed until morning; then he got up and opened the doors of the house of the Lord. He was afraid to tell Eli about the vision. **16** Eli called him, "Samuel, my boy!" "Yes, sir," answered Samuel. **17** "What did the Lord tell you?" Eli asked. "Don't keep anything from me. God will punish you severely if you don't tell me everything he said." **18** So Samuel told him everything; he did not keep anything back. Eli said, "He is the Lord; he will do whatever seems best to him." **19** As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him and made come true everything that Samuel said. **20** So all the people of Israel, from one end of the country to the other, knew that Samuel was indeed a prophet of the Lord. **21** The Lord continued to reveal himself at Shiloh,

where he had appeared to Samuel and had spoken to him. And when Samuel spoke, all Israel listened.

Sermon

I wonder how we are at listening.

Are we good at it.

Do we listen or are we too busy thinking about what we want to say,

Too busy waiting for the opportunity to speak ourselves.

(pause)

When someone is speaking to us do we really hear what they are saying.

Do we spend time to think about what they are saying,

Hear the underlying message as well as what they are saying on the surface.

(pause)

A long number of years ago I did a course on listening skills.

4 modules that helped me to think about how I listen,

to really hear what was being said to me.

(pause)

I also did another course on prayer.

On listening to God.

On hearing God,

And that's what we see in our reading in Samuel this morning.

Samuel learning to listen to God.

Learning to hear when God is speaking to Him.

Learning to know what God is actually saying.

(pause)

‘In those days,

when the boy Samuel was serving the Lord
under the direction of Eli,

there were very few messages from the Lord,
and visions from him were quite rare.’

So this message from God that Samuel heard
was unusual.

It was rare for people to hear God speaking to
them.

There were few messages from the Lord
because the people were not all that faithful to
Him.

There were few visions from the Lord because
God’s people,

as epitomised in the sons of Eli,

were not focused on God,

were not looking to God.

but were focused on themselves.

Looking out for what they could get from life,

Not what they could give to God.

(pause)

Is that how we live our lives.

Focused on ourselves and what we can get out of life.

Rather than focused on God and what we can give to Him.

(pause)

Many people would say that now is also a time where we hear few messages from God.

Now is also a time when we rarely have visions given to us by God.

Is that because,

like then,

we're focused on ourselves and not on God.

Is that because we're out of practise in listening to God,

We need to do some listening to God training modules,

We need practise in hearing God,

Training in knowing what we are listening too,

Knowing when we truly are hearing the voice of God.

(pause)

How many times have you personally had a message from God.

Known God's voice speaking to you.

And most of us probably don't even relate to the idea of God giving us visions.

(pause)

But in this story Samuel clearly had a message from God.

And a long one at that.

But he didn't know at first that God was trying to talk to him.

As we may not when God tries to speak to us.

(pause)

Eli is an old man now.

Him being blind suggests being old.

But Samuel is described as a boy.

'when the boy Samuel was serving the Lord under the direction of Eli,'

So Samuel is still relatively young.

A boy,

Not yet a man.

Not old enough to have had his Bar Mitzvah.

But older than he was when he first went to live in the sanctuary where the sacred Covenant box was kept.

(pause)

A few years have passed since Samuel came to live in the temple.

And in that time Samuel has not had a direct message from God before.

He doesn't know what God's voice sounds like.

He's not expecting to hear directly from God.

And when he hears a voice he thinks it's Eli's voice.

That's a fair enough assumption on Samuel's part.

It maybe that as Eli has got older he's often shouted out for Samuels help during the night.

So Samuel is used to hearing Eli calling him,

So when he hears a voice saying Samuel,
Samuel,

He's bound to think that it's Eli.

But it's not Eli this time,

And it takes three times of Samuel waking him
up from his sleep before Eli works out who it is
that is calling.

Before Eli thinks maybe the voice that is
calling is God's voice.

'Then Eli realized that it was the Lord who was
calling the boy,

so he said to him,

"Go back to bed; and if he calls you again, say,
"Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.'

(pause)

I wonder if we are expecting to hear God speak to us.

Do we live expecting to hear messages directly from God?

And will we recognize them if we get them.

Will we know what to do and what to say if God speaks to us.

Eli is no longer used to hearing God speak to Him so he is slow to recognise where the voice is coming from.

He may also be thinking Samuel is awfully young for God to be speaking directly to him like this.

(pause)

In this chapter Samuel receives a message from God.

Hears God speaking to him.

And within that message he receives a call to be a prophet.

We've all heard God speaking to us directly in our lives at least once.

When we received the call to follow Jesus.

When we were given the choice as to whether we were going to become a disciple or not.

(pause)

I've also received a call to become a minister.

Called by God to a specific job,

To a specific role.

And called by God to come here to Kelso Country Churches to serve Him.

To serve all of you as your minister.

(pause)

You heard God's call to follow Jesus and you responded.

Have you heard His call to do anything else,

And have you responded to it.

(pause)

As we read through this book it's at times hard to discern what role exactly Samuel has taken on.

Eli was the High Priest,

as well as being the judge and ultimate leader of Israel.

Samuel is talked of here as being made a prophet by God –

Verse 20 of this chapter says,

‘So all the people of Israel,

from one end of the country to the other,

knew that Samuel was indeed a prophet of the Lord.’

(pause)

But he also takes over Eli's leadership role

And at times seems to do a worship,

priestly role

of praying for the people,

And offering sacrifices.

(pause)

There is little mention,

when Samuel is alive,

of who is doing the priestly role of Eli.

(pause)

A prophet's primary business was dealing with the word of God.

Here in chapter 3 we see Samuel receiving a direct word from God.

‘The Lord said to him, "Some day I am going to do something to the people of Israel that is so terrible that everyone who hears about it will be stunned.”

This was not an easy word for a boy to hear.

To hear that God was going to

'carry out all my threats against Eli's family,
from beginning to end'

How was Samuel going to deal with this
message.

How was he going to tell Eli.

What would he say if Eli asked him about it.

(pause)

Prophet's received God's word at times
through visions,

dreams

and supernatural experiences.

Samuel heard the voice of God repeatedly

And also apparently had a vision of God.
Verse 10,

'The Lord came and stood there,

and called as he had before, "Samuel!
Samuel!"

So God came and stood at the foot of his bed
and clearly spoke to him.

(pause)

Now what would we think if God came to the
foot of our bed and spoke to us directly.

Maybe we'd think we were hallucinating.

Suffering from a mental illness.

It's not that long ago that in the Soviet Union
as was religious beliefs were automatically
assumed to be signs of a mental illness.

You could be locked away in a psychiatric
hospital just for believing in God.

If you said you also heard God speaking to
you you'd never see the light of day.

(pause)

Hearing voices is frowned on a bit in our culture too.

Is one symptom of schizophrenia

And is something to worry about.

Especially if the voices tell you to harm yourself or someone else.

But in religious circles hearing voices is acceptable.

In the church it's acceptable to hear voices.

It's encouraged to hear the voice of God speaking to us.

And it's some thing that we should all want to happen.

And it would be of great encouragement to us if,

like Samuel,

we heard God calling out our name.

If we heard God speaking,
telling us what He was going to do,
or telling us what he wants us to do.

(pause)

The message Samuel heard was not an easy
one to hear

Or one that he would really want to report.

Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision

And rightly so.

It was not good news for Eli

And certainly not for his sons who were going
to die because of their bad behaviour as
priests.

‘I have already told him that I am going to
punish his family forever because his sons
have spoken evil things against me.’

(pause)

Eli insists on hearing what God has to say.

"What did the Lord tell you?" Eli asked.

"Don't keep anything from me.

God will punish you severely if you don't tell me everything he said."

(pause)

And he doesn't shoot the messenger as so often happens in situations like this.

He comforts Samuel in his response.

"He is the Lord;

he will do whatever seems best to him."

You can hear the sadness and gentleness in his response.

Eli had been a good man.

He'd done his best as leader and priest.

He hadn't been a great dad,

But it turns out Samuel wasn't either which you will see later if you read further in 1st and 2nd Samuel.

(pause)

Eli hadn't been able to control his sons,

To stop them from doing and saying the terrible things that they did.

Eli had helped draw Samuel closer to God.

It was Eli that directed Samuel to listen to God.

It was Eli who discerned that God was trying to speak directly to Samuel.

Eli enabled Samuel to hear God's word.

(pause)

We too need to listen to what God is saying to us,

What He is trying to get through to us.

We may not always like what He says.

But we have to listen like Samuel did.

We have to hear and be willing to pass the message along.

We should respond as Eli did.

"He is the Lord; he will do whatever seems best to him."

(pause)

The Church as a whole is working hard trying to hear God's voice

Trying to discern God's will for the future path that we are to take.

And it's a hard path that the church has set out along.

So radically changing how and where we will minister and serve him

The changes that the Assembly has made will radically change how church works

And where there will be full-time ministers
serving

And we need to be part of the discussion and
planning

we need to be praying and listening to God
speak

Listening to what He is saying to us about the
changes we will need to make here.

(pause)

From this point on Samuel's relationship with
God was close and constant.

The word of the Lord was no longer rare.

But was,

through Samuel,

freely available throughout the land.

'The Lord continued to reveal himself at Shiloh, where he had appeared to Samuel and had spoken to him.

And when Samuel spoke, all Israel listened.'

Amen.

Let us pray

Help me, O Jesus, to realise that I am your ambassador.

Whenever people see me they see you within me;

whenever they hear me, they hear my words as yours.

I know I can never represent you perfectly, but may your Spirit be within me,

so that I can do it as well as possible.

(pause)

God of love, God of care, you value each and every one of us

It is hard to take it in: that we are, each and every one of us, your children.

Called to share this overwhelming love with all around us.

Called to live our life of faith by feeding the hungry and clothing the naked.

(pause)

Sometimes we find that hard to do Father.

At times we live selfish, uncaring lives.
We let ourselves down and we let you down.

(pause)

May we know your love and forgiveness.

Know that you give us second chances.

(pause)

Father, you call us to be a community of faith
that can transform the world;

you call us to proclaim you,

to live your love, to tell our story.

Help us to do so confidently

(pause)

Father there are times we find it hard to
proclaim confidently.

When we see people who are hurting,

Who are seriously ill,

Who have just been made redundant

Or are threatened with losing their homes over
debts that they have got into.

At those times Father we know that we
proclaim your message best by the love

Care

And support that we give.

(long pause)

Help us Father to live lives of love and care.

To live lives that proclaim your love to the world.

(pause)

In Jesus name we pray. **Amen.**

Benediction

Go into your week with your ears open
to the sound of God's voice calling your name.

Go into your week with your eyes open
to see the face of Jesus in unexpected places.

Go into your week with your heart open
to receive the Spirit of God, the Spirit of
Peace.