

2nd Sunday After Epiphany (Year B)
1 Samuel 3:1-10 [11-20]
Christ Lutheran Church – Zionsville
Rev. Wesley Smith III

Our first lesson this morning stands at the beginning of something new in the lectionary cycle. 1st Samuel is the beginning of the stories of kingship in Judah and Israel; a time when God's people grew weary with the occasional judge who rescued them from their disobedience. The only problem being that they'd find themselves praying to a new false god at the next opportune moment. For these reasons and more, Israel had grown tired of the judges, and they longed for a true king. They longed for direction. But Israel's M.O. had proven that direction from within couldn't match the guidance from above. 1st Samuel 3 begins with this ominous note. Not only is "the word of the lord rare," but the leadership of Israel had become corrupt. Eli's sons had been using their 'priestly powers' to satisfy their own fancy and desire, yet their actions went unchecked – but not by God. The word of the Lord was distant, indeed. And then enters a boy – Samuel.

His story is well known – He's the young boy who hears his name called during the night and has trouble discerning its origin. At first, he thinks it's his father Eli, but after three tries, and some guidance from his father, Samuel realized that the voice calling his name is in fact a summons from God. And the message God bears for Samuel is both astonishing, and mysterious – God says "*See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears it tingle.*" In other words, 'Perk up! Something *new* is coming!' Samuel goes on to become one of the most renowned prophets in Scripture, but before we feel too disconnected from our Biblical relatives, it is helpful to realize that Samuel's origin story is also ours. Each of us have experienced God's call. But, that call isn't always clear; and much like a cold winter's morning it's far easier to fall back asleep and tune everything out, than to respond, and head out into the cold unknown.

This morning let's quickly explore three elements of Samuel's story.

First, there are some striking parallels between our story and 1st Samuel – primarily verse 1, "The Word of the Lord was rare in those days."

Well, what do you think? *Is the Lord's Word rare in today's world?* To be honest, that's a tricky question. As one who believe in the Holy Spirit, I do believe God's Word is present, but it seems more distorted than anything. If Christianity speaks anything to our hearts, or to the world, they're words of love and peace, yet when you ask people to describe Christians (those who are the bearers of God's Word), those descriptors don't top the list, rather, hypocrite and 'out-of-touch,' take the lead – and it's always unfair to paint with a broad brush – lest we sink into the black-hole of stereotypes, but the truth isn't always kind, nor should it be, often times it is lonely. If there's a lesson for the church in Samuel's experience, it's that

listening should come first. Admittedly, this is difficult. But in order for the church to find points of relation with newer generations, God's people need to listen and take these voices seriously. Samuel teaches us to not take offence, simply to listen. God's voice comes from strange places, and often when we aren't listening. So, is God's Word rare? Perhaps, we might simply be listening in the wrong places.

This brings us to our second point:

What makes Samuel's story so fun is the somewhat comical nature of God's call. The back and forth between God, Eli, and Samuel is something out of a comedy. But if you strip away the humor this passage contains a cautionary tale, that of *delayed recognition*.

Think to yourselves. Have you ever put something off? And not something like, I don't know – not brushing your teeth every now and then. I'm talking about something BIG – I'll just assume you know what I'm talking about. Putting things off might be the easiest thing to do, but it's also among the most destructive. From birth, we've all heard the refrains: if you put off paying the bills, the power goes out. If you put off changing your oil, it'll only create more issues.

Delay, delay, delay. It's so easy.

We can fall into this trap as Christians. But, I'll tell you what we cannot put off. We cannot put off living into our baptismal vows – primarily proclaiming the good news of God in Christ though *word and deed*. Simply put, we are called to make new disciples – it's what we've been called to – *all of us!* Like oil is to an engine, our baptismal calling is to our very being, and if we put off, if we delay living out our baptismal calling then we place a limit on God's love, and what's more we place a limit on what God can accomplish in our lives.

Acting, however imperfect it may be, is still action. It may seem odd, but seeking out disciples and failing is still ministry. Acting in faith may be imperfect but it's acting in faith nonetheless. Now, initially Samuel misses the mark, he has a delayed response to God's call, but eventually he catches on. So, ask yourselves, *how many times have you been called? If you think you've been called, why delay?*

Which brings us to the final point – how are we to interpret verse 11? God says, "I Am about to do something...that will make both ears of anyone who hears it tingle." It is perhaps somewhat odd to think of God's call in this way, but have you ever had a tingle? Have you ever had a moving experience that caused you to stand back only to be embraced by your own goosebumps? What's the last time the Word of God made us tingle? What's the last time you got pins and needles thinking about God

Occasionally, people suggest that raising a dog is akin to raising a child. To some extent, I agree. One of the similarities lies in certain trigger words. When it comes to a dog, saying 'walk' or 'treat' holds significance. With Evelyn, 'treat' has become a fascinating part of her learning and growth.

Initially, while dining with us, Evelyn would consume half of her meal and then request a treat. Jess and I decided that we didn't want treats to hinge on finishing her plate; instead, we aimed for them to be special occasions. So, most of the time, we acquiesced.

When we asked what treat she desired, nine times out of ten, 'cookie' was her response. One of us would then walk about five yards away, out of sight, while Evelyn eagerly anticipated it. The crinkle of the Oreo wrapper would illicit an audible *gasp* and upon its arrival at the table, Evelyn would erupt with joy.

As for the leftover food on her plate, I'll embrace the joy.

What I love about this small interaction is that despite Evelyn knowing what's coming, there's still an element of anticipation. The sound of the wrapper crinkling hints at something arriving, better yet, not just *something* but *precisely* what's coming.

The Word of God is like that crinkling wrapper—it's the whisper in our ears reminding us that God is at work, with great plans in store for us.

That tingling sensation is the Holy Spirit, guiding us to serve, love, forgive, and show grace. Even though it might be challenging at times, there's a joy, one that resonates deep within us, when we live according to God's calling.

I acknowledge the analogy only goes so far; in ministry, there are moments we receive the 'cookie,' and others where we merely hear the wrapper crinkle. Yet, God is consistently at work, if only we have ears to listen.

And you know, Sammual had some difficult there in the beginning - listening - God was playing phone tag with Samuel. But! God constantly redirected him until the message sunk in, until the crinkle meant something until the 'tingle' of God's call was realized and lived out.

So, friends, it occurs to me that Samuel's story serves three purposes. First, we have the story of Samuel to remind us that where he was reluctant we can be receptive. Secondly Samuel's story urges us to make decisions based on the tingle of hope. And lastly Samuel's story reminds us that God initiates contact – every time! God acted this way with Samuel, and God acts this way with us.

So, are we listening?

- Amen

