

GOD SPEAKS TO KIDS TOO

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Pastor Joyce Anderson-Reed

1 Samuel 3:1-21

The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.

One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Then the LORD called Samuel.

Samuel answered, "Here I am." And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down. Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

"My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down."

Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD : The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

The LORD called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!"
Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

And the LORD said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle. At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them. Therefore, I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.' "

Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the LORD. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, but Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son."

Samuel answered, "Here I am."

"What was it he said to you?" Eli asked. "Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you." So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, "He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes."

The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD. The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.

This morning we are celebrating the baptisms of Rody, Pablo, and Christiana. Therefore, I wanted to craft a sermon that would be meaningful to them on this special day. So I deliberately chose a story from the Bible where a kid was the central character. The story of Samuel.

The first three verses give us some information that is critical to the story. First, we're told that "in those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions." This was a time when most people not only didn't worship God, but also they didn't even know who God was. Eli's own sons, priests who were supposed to take over his office, were living immoral lives by stealing meat from the offerings to be sacrificed to God, and by luring women into the house of God to sleep with them. There was no distinction between what was holy, and what was not holy. Perhaps you can think of parallels in our own world today.

These are the men Samuel is being influenced by as he grows up. Each day he is struggling through his daily chores to live, to work, and to grow . . . surrounded by men who have corrupted God's House of Worship.

Second, we're told that Samuel is just a boy. Scholars guess he's probably between the ages of 10-12. His job was to help the elderly priest Eli look after the Temple. But how did he come to live here in the first place?

In chapters one and two of I Samuel we learn that his mother Hannah had given Samuel into the service of the Lord as a way of saying thank you to God. She had

been barren for many years, longing for a child, and God finally answered her prayers and she conceived. She had promised God that if she conceived and bore a son, then she would dedicate that child to the Lord. Samuel was born, and when he was weaned, probably at three-years-old, Hannah took Samuel to the House of the Lord to live with Eli.

So we find the young boy Samuel living in this place of worship. The ark of the covenant which held the 10 commandments was kept there. In fact, we're told that Samuel slept near the ark. He also probably tended to the lamps. One lamp was kept burning all night long and was not extinguished until dawn. And this is the third important piece of information: when our story opens, verse 3 tells us that this lamp of God had not yet gone out. This meant that it was probably just an hour or two before dawn.

The stage is set: a young boy Samuel, dedicated to the Lord by his mother, living & sleeping in the House of God at Shiloh, in the wee hours of the morning, during a time when the word of the Lord was rare . . . and he's the one who hears God speak.

Is this not the most bizarre thing you've ever heard of?!

THE MESSAGE

During a time when rarely anyone heard the Lord speak—including the priests and prophets—God chooses to send a message to a young, inexperienced boy. One would think that God would give his long awaited word to someone with a little more wisdom and insight to receive it. Someone a little more prepared to understand it. But no, he chooses a pre-adolescent boy to talk to. God seems to have a pattern of revealing his word to the people we would least likely expect.

And he begins by calling “Samuel! Samuel!” He calls Samuel by his name.

God breaks his silence by speaking Samuel's name.

I love this part of the story! It shows us a God that knows us personally. When God wants us, he will call us by name. And it also shows us a God that considers kids an important part of the kingdom. If the grown-ups have become distant from God, if they're living immoral and corrupt lives, then God will by-pass them for the next generation. He will come to the children and entrust them with his words.

We should never doubt for one minute that God has spoken, is speaking, and will continue to speak to our children. Children and teenagers have an openness to God, a desire for God, a willingness to say “yes” to God that we adults can become deaf and blind too.

Christiana, Pablo, and Rody . . . I want to say what a blessing it will be in your lives that each of you has said “yes” to God at such an early age. God spoke to your heart, called you by name, and you responded. Your decision to accept Jesus as your Savior and to be baptized at the ages of 11, 12, and 13 is a testimony of faith for the rest of us.

THE MENTOR

What’s also fascinating in this story of Samuel is that it took him a while to realize it was God talking to him. God had to call his name four times before he clued in. And the only reason he clued in was because Eli, his mentor, finally realized what was going on . . . Guess what, Samuel, maybe the Lord is trying to get your attention?! And Eli gives Samuel very succinct, yet sage advice: “When he calls again, say, Here I am; you called me.”

When God calls us, he doesn’t do so in a vacuum. God tends to have a mentor just around the corner to help us discern the call. Sometimes it’s just one person, sometimes it might be a community of persons. But if we look carefully, if we listen closely, God will send us exactly whom we need to help us.

Now, what is a mentor? A mentor is someone who affects and influences the development of another. Mentors nurture our souls. They shape our character. They call us to completeness, wholeness, and holiness with God. (page 186, *Four Pillars of a Man’s Heart* by Stu Weber)

When you’re a child, a mentor might be a parent, a grandparent, a teacher, a coach, a group of adults in the church you attend. Mentors make a difference in your life. When I was growing up, I never lived close to my grandparents, so many of the older people in my church became my adopted grandparents. Grammy Mull used to baby-sit me when I was a toddler. Mr. and Mrs. Sigler were my Sunday School teachers and taught me how to live like Jesus. These are people that changed my life.

Most of Rody, Pablo and Christiana’s grandparents don’t live in La Paz. But lucky for them, they attend a church that is full of people who can be their adopted aunts, uncles, and grandparents! These young people need you as mentors. They are

watching how you live out your Christian faith. Sometimes these kids are watching us, learning from us, and we may not even realize it.

Someone wrote this poem called “When You Thought I Wasn’t Looking”:

When you thought I wasn’t looking, I saw you hang my first painting on the refrigerator, and I wanted to paint another one.

When you thought I wasn’t looking, I saw you feed a stray cat, and I thought it was good to be kind to animals.

When you thought I wasn’t looking, I saw you make my favorite cake just for me, and I knew that little things are special things.

When you thought I wasn’t looking, I heard you say a prayer, and I believed there is a God I could always talk to.

When you thought I wasn’t looking, I felt you kiss me goodnight, and I felt loved.

When you thought I wasn’t looking, I saw tears come from your eyes, and I learned that sometimes things hurt, but it’s all right to cry.

When you thought I wasn’t looking, I saw that you cared, and I wanted to be everything that I could be.

When you thought I wasn’t looking, I looked . . . and I wanted to say thanks for all the things I saw when you thought I wasn’t looking.

Ryan, who is thirteen-years-old, learned about listening, loving, and living from his grandmother. He says:

My grandma is very special to me. She is always cleaning but whenever I come over, she usually has time to talk. Often my grandma has shown her love and caring nature by focusing on other people. Whenever asked about how she is feeling, she will often talk about others’ needs instead of her own. She is always sending get-well cards to people although she has had bone cancer herself for nine years.

Grandma and Grandpa emigrated from Holland to Canada by boat and this took two weeks. Although they did not know any English, they began farming and

eventually had six children. Aunty Rita, the oldest child, is mentally challenged and I think that is where Grandma got her love for disabled people. Grandma and Grandpa have been married for fifty-one years.

At first, Grandma sewed her children's clothes but later enjoyed picking up items at rummage sales. Grandma also kept her own garden from which she canned many different kinds of fruits and vegetables. Now Grandma quilts and tries to use up every scrap and piece of fabric.

Today Grandma is eighty and because of cancer, her back is very bent. She is often in pain and wishes to go to heaven to be with Jesus. I am so glad I have experienced her love and care for almost thirteen years.

Rody, Pablo, and Christiana . . . look around you and pay attention to the people God has placed in your lives. In addition to your parents, God has also sent you special men and women to mentor you, to help you grow in your Christian faith. Sometimes you'll just be able to watch someone and learn. Other times you'll be led to ask someone a question. Or maybe someone will just spend time with you and have fun, teaching you what it means to be a friend.

Like Samuel listened to Eli, you too can learn how to listen to other people for wisdom and advice. Often other people have more clarity about what is going on in our lives than we do, because they can step back and look at the situation more objectively. At times in our lives, especially those times requiring discernment, it's important to seek out wise counsel. Friends, family members and even strangers can be messengers for God, often without realizing it!

Mentors change your life. Expect God to send you some! Look for these people and be encouraged by them.

THE MISSION

Finally, as we look at this passage, we see that God gave Samuel a mission. Despite the fact that he was only a young boy, God entrusts Samuel with a huge task. He has to deliver a very ominous message to Eli. I can imagine that after God talked to him, Samuel tossed and turned all night trying to figure out how to tell Eli the dire news about his family. But in the morning, when Eli tracked him down, Samuel obediently repeated what the Lord had told him. And because he was obedient, we're told that the Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground. This means that Samuel's words were proven

to be reliable, when he delivered a message from God it came true, thus proving that he was a prophet of the Lord.

Samuel's first mission from God was to simply deliver a difficult message to Eli. But because he was faithful with that mission, God continued to give him more and more. His age didn't matter. What mattered was the condition of his heart: was he willing to place himself in God's hands, being obedient to his voice? Yes, he was.

Christiana, Pablo, and Rody . . . the three of you are not too young to receive a mission from God. God can speak to you just like he spoke to Samuel. All God looks for is an obedient, willing heart. Will you listen to what God tells you to do?

It might be something simple, like helping a friend study for a test. Or it might be harder, like becoming friends with someone everyone else wants to make fun of. Or maybe God will ask you to pray every day for a certain person. Or maybe you'll be asked to share the story of your baptism with someone who doesn't believe in God. Once you say "yes" to Jesus, you can expect God to show up and give you a mission.

And every time a kid goes on a God-mission, lives are changed.

Sam McGarrity tells the story about a little girl named Angela and how she changed an entire church . . .

Melba Community Baptist Church is located in Melba, Idaho. In 1977, interest in the church had dropped off. Some hurts and misunderstandings had made their marks, splitting up the congregation; and now the membership had dwindled to about 12 people on the verge of giving up. In fact, on this particular Sunday the membership was voting if they should indeed close the doors of the church.

Their meeting was interrupted when a seven-year-old child named Angela walked through the doors and asked, "Where is the Sunday school, please?" Apparently she had attended some activity at the church the week before, and she'd decided to find out what Sunday Services were all about. Even more amazing was that her parents, who did not go to church, agreed to drop her off.

Needless to say, the people of the church were stunned. And then the lay pastor--for they couldn't afford to hire a full-time pastor--discontinued the meeting and

held Sunday School. And then, because Angela appeared to be staying, he held a church service too.

Angela returned the next Sunday, and the next and the next. For two and a half years, Angela came faithfully to church. She came alone, and unlike the scattering of people who kept to the back pews, Angela sat down in front.

Whenever the question arose about closing the church--and it did from time to time--another would follow: "But where would Angie go?"

This little girl became the reason for the Melba Baptist Church to struggle on, to plan a message, to somehow nurture a young spirit from one Sunday to the next. The other spirits there were much older, and getting more so by the year. Angela was their glimmer of hope; she was their future.

"Who are her parents?" the lay pastor asked.

"Dairy people. Wealthy people. They got a couple thousand acres, a couple thousand cows. Big people in the Farm Bureau. Serious business folks." But it was obvious they were too busy to come to church. Not once had they come in the last two and a half years with Angie.

And they were too busy for church. In fact, Jerry, Angie's father, had made it clear to his wife Mary Lou that he had no use for church or for people who hung around in sanctuaries and sang those sad songs. But then, much to the amazement of the tiny congregation, Angie's family began to attend with her. At age 10, Angie had invited them to come.

Jerry says, "I wasn't the least bit interested in sermons or in God. I went that first Sunday only because my little girl asked me to go. But the songs weren't as sad as Jerry had imagined. And he hadn't counted on the lay pastor being such a warm, friendly pastor, even intelligent. And Jerry began to feel different inside. The emptiness he'd felt for years--the emptiness that couldn't be satisfied by owning all those cows and acres and equipment, nor by holding all those important positions in the agricultural organizations--seemed less empty."

And when the pastor preached a sermon "Why I am a Christian," Jerry, who had never heard of going to the front of the church and giving yourself to Christ, did just that. Tough, macho Jerry knelt at the front and wept. And gradually, in the Sundays that followed, Angie's entire family accepted Christ.

Angie changed that church. It began to grow again until eventually it could hire a full-time minister and renovate and expand its building. As far as the Melba Baptist Church is concerned, the little girl who came alone to church that Sunday long ago, was sent by God. She called them back to hope. She called them back to faithfulness. After all, that's what her name, Angela, means: ANGEL. A messenger from God.

In a few minutes we are going to celebrate the baptisms of Christiana, Pablo and Rody. Three kids who heard a message from God: "Come, follow me." And they said yes. Three kids who need all of us to be mentors to them as they embark on this journey with Jesus. Three kids who God is going to send on a mission to change our world. Three kids who are calling us back to hope and to faithfulness.

God spoke to a kid named Samuel.
God is speaking to kids in our church.
God is ready to speak to all us grown ups too.

May we open our eyes, our ears, our hearts, to listen and respond to God's voice.
Amen.

Sources:

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