

Scriptures

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Psalm 139

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

**Love Through the Cracks**

I want to begin this morning with a reflection an adapted lectio devina. I want you to stop and listen to a few of the phrases from todays scriptures and as you listen see if you hear the voice of God calling upon you, just as you are broken and cracked capable of shining the light of Christ.

1 Samuel 3:1 began “Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.”

*And because the word of the Lord was rare it took Samuel and Eli some time to notice it. But finally in Verse 10 we read* “Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

*In Psalm 139 the psalmist shared* “Oh Lord you discern my thoughts from far away...For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.”

*Paul exhorts us in 2 Corinthians For it is the God who said,* “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup>But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. <sup>8</sup>We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; <sup>9</sup>persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;”

I’m going to go back and read them again. Do you hear a message for you this day?

I can’t help but hear Leonard Cohens when I reflect on these passages.

The birds they sang

At the break of day

Start again

I heard them say

Don't dwell on what

Has passed away

Or what is yet to be

Yeah the wars they will

Be fought again

The holy dove

She will be caught again  
Bought and sold  
And bought again  
The dove is never free  
Ring the bells (ring the bells) that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack in everything (there is a crack in everything)  
That's how the light gets in  
We asked for signs  
The signs were sent  
The birth betrayed  
The marriage spent  
Yeah the widowhood  
Of every government  
Signs for all to see  
I can't run no more  
With that lawless crowd  
While the killers in high places  
Say their prayers out loud  
But they've summoned, they've summoned up  
A thundercloud  
And they're going to hear from me  
Ring the...

I love these passages for so many reasons but mostly because they are real, meaning I can relate. And so they give me hope and fill me with love.

Think about it. Have you ever thought you heard someone call your name in a crowd; or turned around thinking you heard a voice, but no one was there?

I have. So I have no problem believing a young Samuel learning how to serve God “heard” a voice. This passage invites us to consider what it means to be summoned into God’s presence; to know the prompting of divine voice, and to listen intently for directions for our work in the world.

Samuel arrives on stage in a peculiar time and in a peculiar way. The tribal city-states with clan leadership have devolved more and more. “Everyone does what is right in their own eyes,” (Judges 21:25). ... As a result, religious lethargy has left the times devoid of divine animation. Visions were few; rituals were steady, but only rarely provoked a divine encounter: “the word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.”

Samuel is born in these tumultuous times. He was the child his mother longed for in order to be blessed. A wife among wives, she was barren. In the ancient world, a closed womb was cause for grief, and Hannah, his mother had much sorrow, so much that when she prayed for him the priest Eli thought she was drunk (1 Samuel 1:12-14). His birth made her sing, and she sang a prophetic song that leads me to believe she was as much prophet as Samuel would become. His birth song

was revolutionary (1 Samuel 2:1-10), and though she had asked God for him, she listened to an internal prompting that said he belonged to the nation-state and to God.

The story of Samuel, then, does not start with this voice nor with Eli's training, but rather with the mother who suckled him; who cooed over him; who prayed for him; who sang over him; and who weaned him from her breast so that he would be free to learn how to minister to God....

God called from the womb (Psalm 139:13-16). Samuel was known and knew God before he *was born*. We also have been known beforehand -- and we have been brought before God through a series of relationships. If not our parents or families, along the way pastors, friends, youth leaders, strangers have shepherded and nurtured us into a place where we may hear God's call and have an encounter. It made me ponder Who have those people been for us? Who have our Hannahs been?

The second thing that strikes me is that Eli is old, can no longer see, but he still is in service. I don't want to miss that Eli mentors Samuel into identifying God's voice. Sure, it took three times of Samuel running into Eli's room in the middle of that night before Eli had an "a ha" moment. But as Samuel lay on his bed in the temple at Shiloh, near the ark of God -- the icon that symbolized God's presence -- he was in a position to hear...

Eli knew at least how to attend to that voice. "Speak, for your servant is listening." And, sure enough, the voice of God called "as before" (verse 10). God's persistence and Eli's mentoring work hand in hand. Though no ordinary, off-the-street person, Eli's role in Samuel's calling does remind us that we learn how to discern God's voice and call in proximity to people who have come before us. They help attune our ears and heart to hear from God. Who mentors us to listen for the voice, what Howard Thurman called "the sound of the genuine" that's in all of us? How do we prepare to hear it completely in order to respond to it fully? Who are the Elis in our lives?

I can almost guarantee they are the people who have been there when we have felt cracked and they have reminded us that we are precious treasures. When life has left us feeling in despair and they have reminded us of our light.

As a minister and a counsellor I hear some hard stories, and sometimes I have hard times and in those times I wish I could say one day it will all be perfect but that is simply not true. Life is hard, it is full of trials and persecutions and sometimes it can be hell on earth but today's scriptures remind us that God is still speaking. That we are known and knit together so completely, that even when trials come and life feels broken we are not alone we are still beautiful in God's eyes. Samuel was a young man, born of a desperate woman who was so thankful for the gift of a son that she gave him back to God. And the light shone through her barren cracks. The light shone so bright that Samuel became a prophet we know of to this day.

Thank God that we are loved so completely that no matter where we come from, no matter our status, our race, our gender, our abilities we are considered equal to the most holy God.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.