

Last week we heard the story of God hearing the peoples' complaints after being out of Egypt, out of slavery for one month. They wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. The books in the Bible Joshua, Judges and Ruth- all tell stories of their coming into the Promise land and the first period where the twelve tribes of Israel are loosely connected. Today's story features Samuel and he represents the beginning of a new period where Israel joins and forms a kingdom.

Read I Samuel 3:1-21

God is calling: this week God calls Samuel, next week David is called and anointed by Samuel, then God calls Solomon to build the temple in Jerusalem, finally Elijah is called in the wilderness to go minister in the north. All of these stories emphasize how our God is a calling God.

Samuel's call story starts even before he is born, with Hannah, his mother. So often in the history of the church women's roles have been both under recorded in scripture and the stories that are in the Bible that highlight women's roles don't get read as often. Other years we have read Hannah's story as part of the Narrative Lectionary. I bring this up to remind us that this whole story starts with the faith and persistence of a woman.

Today's reading says, "The Word of the Lord was rare in those days," and that, "Eli's eyes were getting dim," what does that mean? Is it simply that Eli's eyesight was getting bad and that there weren't any prophets in the land (the word of the Lord is often associated with the words of prophets). Or is there something else? Eli's sons were called and ordained priests and they had been stealing from the offering plates from the temple at Shilo. Eli doesn't punish them or deal with the problem. Is "the word of the Lord rare," referring to what happens when you have leadership like Eli's family, their misconduct is

getting in the way of the proclamation of God's word. The institution is getting in the way of the good news.

It is also very interesting that this story is taking place at Shilo, where the Arc of the Covenant is. The Arc of the Covenant is fancy box that contains Aaron's staff and the stones of actual Ten Commandments written on by God. The Arc is kind of thought of as a portable power point of God's presence, but the Arc isn't enough for the Word of the Lord to be in a place. The written word isn't enough. The Bible can be prominently displayed, but the Word can still be rare. How does the Word become an active, dynamic form that actually shapes peoples' lives? Take 30 seconds of silence and answering for yourself – how does the Word of God become an active dynamic form that shapes peoples' lives?

In today's story, the Word of the Lord comes to a child, Samuel but God's word isn't something Samuel wants to hear. Samuel is called to be a truth-teller about the wrong-doing that has happened. God isn't content with leaving things the way they are. God is moving forward and doing a new thing. The Word of the Lord, being active and dynamic, is associated with clarity and creativity with God working through and with ordinary people to do great things. The Bible is filled with stories of call but often we don't understand ourselves as called. Just a couple of years ago there was a multi-denominational study looking at people's understanding of their being called and the overwhelming majority of non-pastors said, "They don't see themselves as called by God."

You are called. God calls everyone and in different ways. We are called in church some to preach, some to teach, some to do justice, some to count and deposit offering. But church is only

one of the four areas of calling that Martin Luther talked about. God calls you in all four of these areas: family—large or small, near or far—mother, father, sister, brother, aunt, uncle, grandparent—we are called to be family. We are called in our community to vote and be politically active by advocating for those that have no voice. That might look like showing up this Wednesday 7pm Plymouth City Hall to stand up for affordable housing for working families. We are also called in our workplaces. In our jobs providing good service, ethical leadership, listening ear, and reliable products—as cashier, actuary, chef, repairman, businesswoman, stylist, biologist. Our God is a God that calls. You are called. Like Samuel- we can wake up and participate in God's work.

Jesus is God as flesh fully participating in God's mission giving eternal life and abundant life to all God's children—to you and to me. By grace, we have been saved through faith, not of our own doing but a gift from God. God's calling is part of our salvation; part of the abundant life is living out the strengths God has placed in us at this current time and place. Let us pray: God help us to see our neighbor, taste your forgiveness, smell your sweet grace, feel your unconditional love, and hear your calling in our lives. Amen.