

**Scripture: 1 Samuel 3:1-10, (11-20)**

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3:1 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.

3:2 At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room;

3:3 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.

3:4 Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!"

3:5 and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down.

3:6 The LORD called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again."

3:7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

3:8 The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy.

3:9 Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

3:10 Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

3:11 Then the LORD said to Samuel, "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle.

3:12 On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end.

3:13 For I have told him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them.

3:14 Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering forever."

3:15 Samuel lay there until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli.

3:16 But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." He said, "Here I am."

3:17 Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also, if you hide anything from me of all that he told you."

3:18 So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. Then he said, "It is the LORD; let him do what seems good to him."

3:19 As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground.

3:20 And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the LORD.

**Psalms 139:1-6, 13-18**

139:1 O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

139:2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

139:3 You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.

139:4 Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely.

139:5 You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

139:6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

139:13 For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

139:14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

139:15 My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

139:16 Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.

139:17 How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

139:18 I try to count them -- they are more than the sand; I come to the end -- I am still with you.

### **Proclamation of the Word**

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Time Magazine has declared the 2011 person of the year as the Protestor, collectively.<sup>1</sup>

In light of today being Martin Luther King's birthday, we remember protests of another era. While the country remembers a Civil Rights leader, the church also remembers King, the prophetic preacher. He became the spokesperson for a Civil Rights movement for which many people deserve credit.

"King organized. King marched. King preached. King prayed."<sup>2</sup>

While his dream was deeply rooted in the American dream, his action was deeply rooted in a profound trust in, obedience to, and relationship with the God of the Universe who also knows each one of His children intimately. Before he was an activist, Dr. Martin Luther King was first and foremost a person of faith in God. I am grateful to Dr. Luke Powery, professor of Preaching at Princeton Seminary and an African American preacher for this insight. He writes:

*King believed "that activism prefaced by prayer can be most effective." [2] In other words, personal spirituality grounds social transformation. The roots of social and civic engagement are listening skills. Before speaking into situations of injustice in the world, silence is required with an open ear to the One who loves the world.*<sup>3</sup>

The drum major for justice stepped to the beat of the heart of God as he prayed for guidance wisdom and strength. *Powery reminds us that...*

*Hearing God's voice was critical for the prophetic witness of Dr. King. In January 1956, during the Montgomery bus boycott, he received a threatening phone call late at night. He couldn't sleep. He went to his kitchen and took his "problem to God." He was at a breaking point of exhaustion and about to give up. He spoke to God and says that he experienced the Divine and "could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice, saying, 'Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth. God will be at your side forever.'" His fears and uncertainty ceased because God spoke and gave him "inner calm." [3] God provided the interior resources for him to do his social justice work. He needed God to speak first. Then he could act. He listened prayerfully then proclaimed prophetically.*<sup>4</sup>

Samuel knew that. He was called by God in the darkness of that night to be a prophet of the Lord. For things had grown dim, the word of the Lord was rare in those days. Iniquity had to be addressed. Samuel thought he was hearing Eli, the priest, or dreaming in the night. When Samuel finally realized that it was the voice of God calling him in the night, he did not start to speak, he asked God to speak. "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." Then Samuel listened. Powery writes,

*...the first task of a prophet is to listen. Prayer and protest are married yet this does not mean that one sits in a pew of passivity and does not act. The witness of Dr. King shows otherwise. Even Samuel reveals that prophetic proclamation follows prayerful listening. After he opens his ear to God, he receives his prophetic duty. What he is called to do is not easy. Samuel is called to speak during a time of change, turmoil, and impending war (3:11-20-4:1). Samuel cannot lie down (vv.3, 5, 6, 9) forever but must get up and act upon what he has heard.*<sup>5</sup>

In today's text, Samuel was called upon to be a prophet of the Lord and to speak judgment on Eli's household. What was going on? Eli's own sons had been taking the best parts of the sacrificed animals for themselves. The best parts of the sacrificed animal were to be reserved for God. Samuel would never have a popular message, but he had been called by God to do it. His career follows the way his calling did. He would be the one to speak against monarchy exposing the threat that kings seem to be most concerned about their own security and wealth over the well-being of the people they lead and serve. But he would be the first prophet to anoint and crown the shepherd-boy king, David, with God's direction, of course. Samuel was always concerned that the powerful were taking advantage of the vulnerable. He could not have accomplished anything without listening for God's voice and being shored up by the Holy Spirit.

Followers of Jesus also have inherited the mantle of the prophet. First, we listen to God and then we speak and act as people of faith. That does not always make one popular or safe. And if we think that we do not have work to do on the racial equality front, let's be honest.

In Laurens, SC a store called *the Redneck Shop* opened in the mid 1990's. It has confederate gear and Ku Klux Klan memorabilia. My Political Science professor at Presbyterian College was Dr. David Gillespie. Now retired, he still holds informal discussion groups on Facebook. In response to a *New York Times*<sup>6</sup> article Thursday about the *Redneck Shop*, he posted this note:

*Right after the Redneck Shop opened, there was a big protest rally on the courthouse square in Laurens and I was one of those invited to speak. A couple of days later someone left a business card at our door in Clinton. It read "you have been visited by the Ku Klux Klan." Judi and I took the word "visited" to mean "warned."*

People of faith are called upon to listen to God even through the events of today, both personal events and public events. Then we may be called to speak and to act.

A note of good news about *The Redneck Shop*, in a twist of irony, the deed of the building it occupies was sold to an African American Missionary Baptist preacher by *The Redneck Shop* owner's disgruntled partner. The

Minister hopes that the building, once a segregated movie house and *The Redneck Shop*, will become a community center where different people can come together. Now that is poetic justice.

I was reminded of our own history of race-relations and inequality as I watched the movie *The Help*<sup>7</sup> this week. I have always been so impressed with the courage of persons I have known or read about who faced their unfair treatment with grace and dignity. I have always wondered what their secret was. How could one suffer the indignation without lashing back or losing a sense of one's own God-given value?

I think it has something to do with a profound sense of one's own worth and value in the eyes of God. When so many voices say you don't matter, you are second-class, I know it is important to be grounded in God's Word and assurance.

If you have read or seen the movie *The Help*, you see a portrayal of those caught in the trap of racism. I thought of a couple of scenes in the movie when Aibileen who is the "colored mid" cares for the little white girl she is raising. Baby girl, as Aibileen calls her, is disregarded by her mother, more of a nuisance and an inconvenience to the mother. Baby girl tells the maid, Aibileen, that she is her real mama. When the child is punished and humiliated by her mother, Aibileen reminds Baby Girl over and over, "You is kind. You is smart. You is important."

This is the voice of God channeled through Aibileen. I am sure it is message she had to repeat to her own son, Trelow, and herself in the face of an unjust system. "You is kind. You is smart. You is important."

Like the words of Psalm 139, the message is clear. God knows us intimately, defends us fiercely, and loves us wholeheartedly. And God will not leave or forsake us. "When I come to the end, still I am with you," the Psalmist writes. When the world tears people down, it is important to remember, that all God's children are fearfully and wonderfully made by the hands of God.

Some say prophets tell the future, but prophets also tell the truth about what is actually going on now. Aibileen was a prophet because she told the truth of her experience. She gets to write her story in a book called *The Help* and illumines for us the sin of racism and its complex relationships.

May you and I, the church, say like Samuel, "Speak, for your servant is listening." Listen for God's voice just as Samuel, Dr. Gillespie, Dr. King, and all the unnamed Aibileens listened.

We must listen as we hold the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other, trusting that the God revealed to us most clearly in Jesus and illumined by the Holy Spirit will lead us.

THEN may God grant us the wisdom and courage to speak out and act.

All glory, honor and power be to God. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Kurt Anderson, "The Protestor" in *Time Magazine*, Wednesday, December 14, 2011 at [www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2101745\\_2102132\\_2102373-1,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2101745_2102132_2102373-1,00.html)

<sup>2</sup> Luke Powery, "1 Samuel 3:1-20: Prayerful Listening, Prophetic Proclaiming" at [www.odysseynetworks.org/news/onscripture-1-samuel-3-1-20](http://www.odysseynetworks.org/news/onscripture-1-samuel-3-1-20)

<sup>3</sup> IBID.

<sup>4</sup> IBID.

<sup>5</sup> IBID.

<sup>6</sup> Kim Severson, Robbie Brown, "Uneasy Neighbors in a Southern Gothic Tale" in *The New York Times*, Published: January 12, 2012 at [www.nytimes.com/2012/01/13/us/in-laurens-sc-the-redneck-shop-and-its-neighbor.html?\\_r=2&nl=todaysheadlines&emc=tha23](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/13/us/in-laurens-sc-the-redneck-shop-and-its-neighbor.html?_r=2&nl=todaysheadlines&emc=tha23)

<sup>7</sup> See the movie by *Dreamworks* 2011. Book by Kathryn Stockett, *The Help* (Penquin Books; New York), 2009.