

SPEAKING ABOUT THE THINGS THAT MATTER

RACE RELATIONS SUNDAY



Rev. Tony Patrick, guest preacher

January 17, 2021

1 Samuel 3: 1-20; Psalm 139: 1-6, 13-18

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18 1 O LORD, you have searched me and known me. 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. 3 You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. 4 Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely. 5 You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

13 For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. 14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. 15 My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. 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. 17 How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! 18 I try to count them--they are more than the sand; I come to the end--I am still with you.

1 Samuel 3:1-20 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. 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 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. 4 Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" 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.

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

10 Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." 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. 12 On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. 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. 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."

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

19 As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. 20 And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the LORD.

This is the word of the Lord

Here is a very appropriate quote that a food pantry volunteer of Mt. Hope Presbyterian Church found that has been attributed to MLK Jr., "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter." While it sounds like something that MLK Jr. would say, this quote was not made by him, but said in a sermon he preached right after Bloody Sunday, March 8 1965, where he spoke to the urgent need to speak about things that are important. Even though this was not his quote, many, and I

include myself in that group, believe that he would have been comfortable saying this then as well as today.

We are in an interesting and challenging time in our nation. We still face the dreaded disease and overwhelming deaths from the COVID-19 virus and the new strain variation of it that have already hit our shores. We are still processing how to deal with the awakened consciousness of our nation to the sin of racism that has continued to plague us all, while the brunt of it continues to affect the poorest among us, particularly those of color. We are facing the second impeachment against a sitting president and all the rippling fallout still stemming from his instigation of the invasion of the Capital a little over a week ago. While there are several people who choose to stay in denial over what has happened and who is responsible, no one can deny that all these things are linked together with the lack of trust in elected leadership. And this is precisely the context of our reading from Samuel.

The sons of Eli were to be priests before the people. It was their responsibility to offer intercession for the people before God and one another, but they didn't. They were not effective priests because they were the ones who were taking advantage of the people. We are told they were the ones who purposefully and selfishly mishandling the offerings of the people and took sexual advantage of women who served like secretaries at the entrance of the tents, among other things. As their father and head priest, it was Eli's responsibility to oversee their activities. So Eli was being held responsible by God because he did not discipline them or correct them while they were being trained or serving. Does any of this sound familiar? The call of Samuel, which is our reading today, is a call not just to his personal service to God, but a call of all believers to their responsibility to speak the truth in love, especially in difficult times.

The story is familiar. The young charge, Samuel, hears the voice of God, which he thinks is Eli, time and again through the night. Each time he rushes to Eli's side and repeats that memorable

reply, "Here I am, for you have called me." And each time, Eli denies it and sends him back until he perceives that God is calling the young man. Finally, he tells Samuel that the next time he hears that voice, to respond, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." But then what Samuel hears from God is not good news, but rather God's pronouncement against Eli's household. The following morning Eli insists upon hearing what God told him and this is where we get our lesson today.

It is important to hear and speak the truth even if it is not good news or is hard to deliver. Samuel's life took on a faithful meaning because he did speak the truth God gave him to Eli, who was his mentor. This is not about gaining a personal meaning for our lives as much as it is about speaking up about things that matter. There is a lot of suffering that continues to accumulate around us when people don't say something. I am reminded that at the Spartan basketball games, the announcer would remind us for the good of all that, "if you see something, say something." We are called both inside and outside the church setting to do this very thing. If not, the lives of everyone are brought to lower and lower levels.

During one of the nights this past week, I was awakened with the thought that what is being offered up to God and to the people by some of the leadership in our nation is an offering that has the stench and rot of lies attached to it rather than the sweet aroma of truth. The compounding of lies, uncorrected leadership, fearful brown nosing and selfish activities continue to pile up the stench and has wrecked the core of trust among the people which has contributed to the loss and suffering of many lives around us. It is only when we take the courage to speak the truth in love that that awful stench can be turned around to become the sweet aroma of truth that heals us.

And make no mistake, there will be people held responsible for what has occurred, but especially those who could have and should have spoken up. This being held responsible is not just concerning those who committed the heinous acts but all of us

who have sat by and did not speak up. Like Eli, the church and its members are those who know what is good and right and just for everyone because we have learned this. When we neglect to speak up and speak out against racism, unfair treatment of the poor (which include widows and orphans), inappropriate and outrageous actions against women and inhospitality to strangers, we too became complicit to the moral decay of our nation and others. This is the ugly historical truth of the church and we have to own it. This falls on all of us like it fell upon Eli and his household.

There is, what some call a silver lining, a hope for the future. In our psalm, we are reminded that God knows us intimately. While we have been lax in our responsibilities to speak up, God knows that we are capable of doing so much better and calls us, even as God called Samuel, time and again to stand to bring the sweet aroma of truth as our offering. God was there as we were formed in our mother's wombs and put God's own image there to be nurtured and supported. Each of us was given this image and each of us are responsible, as Paul tells us, to build up the household of faith rather than tear down the temple by fornicating it.

There are many who do not realize that they are temples where God's Spirit is meant to dwell. We are all to hold one another responsible to help us all realize the beauty that God has created. We are all precious and the loss of one, let alone thousands, is an incredible loss to the whole. While this may sound like a communist idea, remember this is God's world and we were all meant to live in it together. This means simply that everything you and I do have consequences for everyone, both good and bad.

It is my responsibility, our responsibility, as children of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, and as I have learned it from my Native American heritage, to act now on behalf of future generations, not just my own. We have to understand that we are one family on earth and the mess we are in right now, we are in

it together. I am not going to say, “we will work it out together” as this phrase has lost much of its potency. What I will say is that those of us who know and understand and differentiate God’s truth from our current culture’s lies are to lead the way in speaking about things that matter.

No longer shall we be silent, because to do so is to encourage those ignorant of God’s truth to continue to ruin life for everyone, including themselves. When we hear others being put down, we must speak up and insist that they be treated with the precious dignity that God has placed in them. When someone or any institutions are polluting and poisoning the earth, we must remind them that this is God’s created world we share, and we must respect it and protect it for ourselves as well as for future generations. Whenever hate is practiced, we must shed light on it for what it is, their fear of losing themselves and believing the lies that they are worthless unless they can put others down. As we continue to discover the foundations and components of institutionalized racism and poverty, we must courageously speak God’s truth, as Jesus did, with the expectation for us to stand for justice and right treatment of all people.

God’s people must not be silent any longer. As Jesus spoke up for us and reconciled us to God, we are called to show God’s light in order to allow the Holy Spirit to bring and sustain life for all.
Amen