

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

<sup>2</sup> *One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> Then the LORD called Samuel.*

*Samuel answered, "Here I am." <sup>5</sup> 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.*

<sup>6</sup> *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."*

<sup>7</sup> *Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.*

<sup>8</sup> *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. <sup>9</sup> 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.*

<sup>10</sup> *The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!"*

*Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." (1 Samuel 3:1-10)*

## God Calls Servants

What do you looking for in a doctor? Not long after we moved here, I needed to see a doctor and we just picked one out of the phone book. I never went back to that guy. He just didn't inspire confidence. What do you look for? Our current family doctor has his University of Michigan diploma on the wall. He has pictures of the Big House and other Michigan paraphernalia hanging in the examination rooms. Would that be an endorsement for you or are you one of those Michigan State people who would consider that a reason to look for a different doctor? In all seriousness, we want our doctors to know what they're doing. But that's not the only thing we look for. As a pastor, I've heard the frustration that comes from doctors who don't share information with you or who aren't easy to get ahold of or who put you off for weeks or months while you try to get an appointment. In the end, you're probably looking for someone who understands that he works for you and who has your best interest at heart. In the church we would say that you're looking for someone with a servant attitude. If that's true about your doctor, it's doubly true about your pastors and teachers. And you know what? You're not the only one looking for that. God is looking for that attitude, too, in the men and women who serve the church. This morning, in two of our Scripture lessons, **God calls servants.**

### I.

**God calls servants to reveal his word.** God called Samuel to be a prophet. This morning, we have the story of how he did that. Samuel was a boy. The text doesn't say exactly how old he was, but at the end of the chapter it talks about him growing up. One night, after he and the elderly high priest Eli had gone to bed, God came and called to Samuel. Twice, Samuel jumped up and ran to Eli. The Bible says that Eli's sight had begun to fail, and it probably wasn't unusual for him to call Samuel if he needed something. Twice, Eli sent him back to bed. But the third time, the light went on for Eli. He realized that the LORD was calling Samuel. And he told him that if God called again, he should answer, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." Sure enough, God came a fourth time and called to Samuel and this time, Samuel answered as he was instructed to. If you read on in the chapter, you'll see that God gave him his first message as a prophet.

That's what a prophet is in the Bible: someone who gives God's message to God's people. For us, the idea of foretelling the future is the heart of prophecy. And because it was God who gave the messages, quite often, God's Old Testament prophets did that. The very first message God gave Samuel did deal with the future of Eli's family. God told Samuel that he was going to punish Eli because he did not restrain the sin of his sons. But notice, even that message about the future was rooted in the present and the past. God had already warned Eli to do something about his sons who were desecrating his house and his offerings. But Eli failed to do so and the sin was continuing. Most of the time in the Old Testament, that's how prophecy worked. God spoke of

what the people were doing and what they had done and then he told them what he was going to do, sometimes immediately, sometimes in the near future, sometimes hundreds or thousands of years down the road. But always, it was God's message to God's people.

God called his servant Samuel to reveal his word. For the next six hundred years until Malachi, the last Old Testament prophet came, God called many other servants to do that same work. But God wasn't done speaking to his people. In our gospel lesson for today, we heard God the Son call Philip and Nathaniel, two of the twelve disciples. When Jesus rose from the dead, he sent the survivors of that group out to found the New Testament Church, to write and collect the New Testament Scriptures, to preach and teach and reach out with the good news of Jesus Christ. They were servants, called to give God's message to God's people. And God continues to call servants to do that work today. Every pastor, every teacher in a Lutheran school, every Sunday School teacher is called by God to share his message with God's people.

Now, there is a big difference between the work that Samuel and Philip and Nathaniel did and the work we do. Our reading this morning says, **"In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions."** In this sentence, "the word of the LORD" probably does not mean the Bible. That, too, was rare, in the sense that there were no printing presses, no bookstores, certainly no Kindles with the Bible loaded onto it. Probably very few people had their own, handmade copies. And, in fact, at this date, only six or seven books of the Old Testament and a couple of psalms had even been written. So it was "rare." But this verse pairs "the word of the LORD" with visions, which is one way that God communicated directly with his Old Testament prophets. God told them what to say. Jesus did the same for the apostles. They lived with him for three years and learned directly from the Savior. When he left them, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to teach them all things and to remind them of all that he had told them. God revealed his message to those men directly. But God never promised that we would always have direct revelation. They needed it in the Old Testament and in the first generation of the New Testament because the Bible wasn't finished yet. But today it is. So when God calls servants today, he still calls us to give his word to his people. But for us, that word is contained, wholly and completely, in the Bible.

The only way that a pastor or teacher can be faithful is if he or she proclaims what God says in that word and strives constantly to help you apply it in your lives today. No matter how likeable or interesting or pleasant a pastor or teacher is, if he or she does not take the Word of God as the only source for their message, they do not belong in the ministry. But why did God do it this way? He loves us. He didn't leave us adrift to find our way through the insights of sinful man. Most churches today operate that way. They look at the Bible as inspiring rather than inspired. They view it as something that moves us and they encourage us to find a message that's meaningful to us in that word, without ever really focusing on what God actually says. What is the end result? We're dependent on scholars, on people who are really moving, on emotion and subjectivity and feeling. None of those things gets us to heaven.

God loves us. He wanted us to know how he worked from before he created the world to make us, and to find us, and to give us faith in his Son. He wanted us to see how he unfolded his plan of salvation from the Garden of Eden, through the history of Israel and the life of Christ, and the outreach of the New Testament Church. He wanted us to see that he always had us in mind and that he controlled all things to bring us to faith so that we know that he will bring us home to heaven. So he gave us something we could depend on, even if our sinful, human pastors and teachers fail us. He gave us his word. Then he gave us a ministry dedicated to that word so that I have something to say to you when I visit you in the hospital or when you've lost people you love or when life beats you. God loves you and he calls servants to reveal his word to you.

## II.

At the heart of the word that he called me to bring to you stands Christ. In the gospel lesson for today, we see Christ calling his disciples. In our epistle lesson, we hear that the glory of Jesus Christ is shared with us. Even in our Old Testament reading, we see Samuel pointing the way to Christ. **God calls servants to reveal our Savior.**

Every word of the Bible is really about Jesus, no matter how far removed from him it seems to be. In Genesis, we find tables of nations and genealogies. In Numbers, we find various countings of the people. Jesus is the point of those things. Jesus is the true point of all the history and poetry and letters. That includes Samuel. Our reading for today says, **"Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him."** What does that mean? Does it mean that Samuel had not yet come to faith?

Probably not. Not knowing the LORD is tied here to the word of the LORD being revealed to him. Samuel was almost certainly a believer. He was there in the tabernacle because his mother, Hannah, had prayed for him and given him back to the Lord. He served the Lord there, every day. But God had not yet made him a prophet who would hear messages directly from him. He did not know the LORD personally the way he was going to.

But in another sense, knowing the LORD meant knowing more than just knowing his name or his rituals or his sacrifices. It meant knowing him as the Savior. That's what Samuel was going to experience firsthand. God was going to use Samuel to rescue Israel from her physical enemies and show that he is the Savior-God. Every time God rescued Israel, he was demonstrating the love that saves his people from their sins. Every time he did that, Samuel himself would grow in his understanding of his Savior. Samuel was a part of God's Old Testament work to bring Jesus to this earth. His mission and his life would be about calling God's people to trust God's promises and be faithful to them. His greatest act would be to anoint David as the model king of Israel, who would serve as a living prophecy of Jesus, the Messiah King.

Philip and Nathaniel came to know the same Savior God, but in a much clearer and more direct way. They got to be eye-witnesses of Jesus' ministry, of his miracles, and finally of his resurrection. They were there in the upper room when he instituted communion and they were there behind locked doors on Easter evening when Jesus appeared and proved that he was alive. God gave them the same task that he gave every Old Testament prophet: to proclaim that Savior. God has given that same job to you and to me.

To Nathaniel, Jesus said, "You will see greater things than this." He was going to see things that I've wished all my life that I could've seen. But in the end, he would see something even greater than that: eternal life. You and I have seen the grace of God. Every day, it acts in our lives. God's grace surprises us. Things we thought were going to hurt don't. Disasters loom and then God rescues us. God gives us people who love us. He gives us a church and its fellowship. God gives us the good news that Jesus lived and died and rose again so that we will live forever. Those are greater things than any unbeliever can see. But we will see even greater things. We will see Jesus in heaven. We will see our Savior living in glory, surrounded by the hosts of angels and the saints that have gone home. We will see the Father, Son and Holy Spirit together. We will see life without pain or sorrow or sin. We can't even imagine what that will be like.

Samuel was a boy when God called him to ministry. God used him to maintain the faith of people who were still a thousand years away from Christ. In the way that God chose for that time and place, Samuel really did show his people Jesus. He showed them the LORD, the Savior God, the God who makes promises and keeps them, the God who controlled all of history to fulfill his plan in the manger and on the cross and in the empty tomb. Philip and Nathaniel saw and proclaimed Jesus until God called them home. That ministry continues today. No pastor or teacher is doing his job unless he shows us Jesus.

Jesus is the ultimate prophet of God. He gives us the message we all need to hear. The message is simple: he has won eternal life for us. He is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. In the Scriptures, we see amazing truths about him. He knew us when he walked this earth. He prepared for us when he called Samuel a thousand years before he was born, three thousand years before we were born. He laid down his life so that we will live. He rose to give us that promise of greater things to come. Samuel and Nathaniel and Philip all point to the treasure that God has given us: Jesus. He is God's message to us. In him, we have eternal life. Amen.