

*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. 2At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; 3the 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. 4Then the Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" 5and 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. 6The 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." 7Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. 8The 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. 9Therefore 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. 10Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."*

*11Then 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. 12On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. 13For 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. 14Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering forever." 15Samuel lay there until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. 16But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." He said, "Here I am." 17Eli 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." 18So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. Then he said, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him."*

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

Where does courage come from? Is it born in a person? What gives one the courage to risk death while another runs in fear?

I think of the prophets of God – how they had the courage to stand alone and stand for God. Some even lost their lives because they spoke what no one wanted to hear. I think of Martin Luther King Jr., how in the places where I grew up his name was often spoken with disdain – causing all that trouble. Today I will attend a worship service where his name will be spoken in thanksgiving to God. He is remembered as a man of God and a man of courage. So it has always been with those God sends. Their way is not easy. Often the message they bring is greeted with violence. They need courage.

Our first lesson today is about the prophet Samuel when he was but a boy. We get to listen in as the Lord calls him, as he responds. And I would like to suggest that in this story we learn something about courage and how it may be formed.

Today's story begins with Samuel asleep in the temple of the Lord at Shiloh. Samuel is young – other boys his age are at home in their own beds but Samuel was brought to Shiloh as a lifelong offering to the Lord when he was weaned. God had given this son to the barren woman, Hannah. She gave her child back to the Lord as soon as she had finished nursing him. She sewed him a new robe each year and brought it to him on her annual visit.

The priest at the shrine was Eli – he and his sons offered the sacrifices – served as the intermediaries between God and the people. Eli was like a father to Samuel.

One night Samuel was awakened from his sleep by a voice calling, "Samuel!" He ran to Eli and said, "Here I am for you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call you. Lie down again." Then a second time the voice calling Samuel. And he ran to Eli and was sent back to bed. And a third time.

Suddenly Eli perceived that it was the Lord who was calling the young boy. So he instructed Samuel: "When you hear the voice calling say, 'Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.'"

"Samuel. Samuel," the voice called

"Speak, for you servant is listening," Samuel responded.

Then for the first time the Lord came to him and spoke. The message was for Samuel to speak to Eli. God was going to punish Eli and his sons for his sons had dishonored God and Eli had not restrained them. This young boy who was totally dependent on Eli was chosen by God to give Eli the message of judgement.

What a terrible thing for God to do to this child. But Eli helped him.

He called Samuel and said, "Samuel my son. What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May the God do so to you and more also, if you hide anything from me of all that he told you."

So Samuel was helped to have the courage to tell the truth. When he was done bringing this message of doom Eli said, “It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him.”

Thus began the ministry of Samuel. A day would come when the Lord would command him to anoint the first king of Israel, Saul. Later the Lord would tell Samuel to tell the king that the Lord would no longer bless Saul because of his disobedience. And while Saul was still ruling Samuel would be commanded by God to go to Bethlehem and anoint a son of Jesse to be king. Samuel would anoint David as king while Saul was still ruling, a very dangerous deed indeed.

And the courage to do all these things? I think it was born in telling Eli what God was going to do.

So often parents want to spare their children the hard things of life. Fitting in, having a good time, being happy – these seem to parents the most important thing for their children. But this story of Samuel makes me realize that sometimes children need to be helped in learning to stand against the crowd, and to speak the truth. For if as a child they learn to always take the easy path will it be any different years later?

Now I do not expect the Lord to awaken any of you from sleep this night by calling your name. But in the places where you live sometimes a hard word, a truthful word, needs to be spoken. And if you do not speak it no one will.

Sometimes in the places where you live someone needs to take a stand for those who are oppressed, and if you do not take the stand who will?

Sometimes in the places where you live someone needs to tell another about Jesus, and if you do not tell who will?