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Joint sermon with Gretchen Bateman and Lacy Stoltzfus (Venture Club)
1 Samuel 3:1-21
“Eli and Samuels”

In today’s text we find God’s people settled in the Promised Land and yet still struggling to be a united group of followers of God. This group has known strong leaders such as Moses and Joshua. Then once they were settled in the land they experienced leadership from various judges who God would raise up during particularly difficult times. So while God’s people have reached the Promised Land we see that it doesn’t solve all their problems, nor does it make life easy with no difficulties.

Today we pick up the story of God’s people in First Samuel chapter 3. Within this familiar text we hear of God’s calling to Samuel and Eli. However, the story, particularly Samuel’s story, actually begins earlier in the book beginning in chapter 1, and we invite you to turn there with us. The book, and this story of Eli and Samuel, does not start in some great halls of power. Instead the story begins in a place of worship, with a woman who is barren, crying out to God. Before we move forward with digging into chapter 3 we want to pause to introduce you to the various characters that we meet already in chapter 1.

Hannah – Gretchen

In chapter 1 we meet Hannah. We are told in verse 1 that she is married to Elkanah (who we will call Elk), and in verse 2 we are told that she has no children. We also know that Elk had another wife named Peninnah (who we will call Penny). Well, Penny had children with Elk. Penny also knew that Elk loved Hannah. So Penny bullied Hannah because Hannah couldn’t have children.

Once a year they would make the trip to the temple to make sacrifices to the Lord Almighty. The priests there were called Hophni and Phinehas (who we will call H and P) who are sons of Eli. More about them later!

Okay, so once a year they would make this long journey to the temple. It was often here that Penny got really mean to Hannah and bullied her. In fact, Penny bullied Hannah so much that it says in this chapter that Hannah could not even eat because she was so upset. This time though Hannah went before God and prayed for a child. In verse 10 we read her prayer “Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.” This prayer shows that Hannah must have felt really desperate, and at the same time really trusted God.

Well, while she was praying Eli the priest, the father of H and P, thought Hannah was drunk! In the temple! And so he told her to put away her wine because getting drunk in the temple is not a good idea. Well, Hannah was not drunk. So she told Eli that she had not been drinking, but instead had been praying out of her pain and grief. In verse 17 Eli tells her that God will hear her cries.

Now we fast forward. Hannah, Elk, and Penny return home. And the Bible tells us that, well you know, a baby appeared within Hannah and Elk was the father. For the full story check out verse 19. We are only kids here, so not going there. So the baby is named Samuel.

So this chapter ends with Hannah making the journey back to the temple. This time though we don’t think Penny comes with her. It sounds like it is just Hannah and the young boy Samuel and Elk. In verse 26 Hannah presents Samuel to Eli, reminding Eli how she had been the

one he thought was drunk, but now she is here to present her son to God. Chapter 2, which you can read later, is Hannah's prayer of thanks to God.

Eli's Sons – Hopni and Phinehas – Lacy

The next characters we want to introduce to you are Eli's two sons which we will still call H and P. We are told back in chapter 1 that they were serving as priests at the temple where Hannah, Elk, and Penny traveled to make their sacrifices. We learn more about them in chapter 2 beginning in verse 12. There we are told that Eli's sons were scoundrels; they had no regard for the Lord. In the Bible people are given various attributes in terms of their relationship with each other and with God. It is never a good thing though when one is called a scoundrel or told that one has no regard for the Lord. This is made even worse when those being described this way are also serving as priests.

Their situation in a nutshell is that they abused their power as priests, and satisfied their own cravings at the expense of honoring and worshiping God. In short, they took the food that was sacrificed to God, only to be saved for God... and they ate it. Even when confronted in their sin, they didn't care, and continued to feast to fill their own appetites while turning their back on God. Eli, as their father, was also held accountable for the actions of his sons.

Eli – The priest – Cindy

Our text for today then begins in chapter 3. Immediately in verse 1 we find Eli. The same Eli who confronted Hannah for being drunk. The same Eli who received the young child Samuel as he was dedicated to God. The same Eli who is the father to H and P, who watched them turn their backs on God and abuse their power for their greed and appetites. Now we are told that this same Eli has become quite old, and has weak eyesight to the point where he could barely see. While still living in the temple he continues to be joined by Samuel.

Samuel – Lacy

Samuel is living in the temple. In chapter 3 we are told that he is still a young boy. It also says that the word of God had not yet been revealed to him. So now we are going to pause here to watch this Bible story in action from some of our friends in Venture Club. As you watch it we encourage you to think about how you are like Eli, and how you are also like Samuel.

{Break for the Skit}

Lacy

As Gretchen and I met with Cindy we spent time looking at this passage in the Bible. We first talked about anything that we had questions about. For example it says in verse 3 that the lamp of God had not yet gone out. What does this mean? Well, we learned that the lamp of God burned from evening until morning, so that means that this story took place sometime in the middle of the night.

Another example would be that in verse 13 we are told that God will judge Eli and his family because of what his sons did. However, in chapter 3 we do not know what his sons had done. So we had to go back in the earlier chapters to find out what happened. In finding that out we also learned that there were specific areas of the animal that were only given to God. Because at first I didn't think it needed to be such a big deal that H and P ate the meat. But then learning more about it I realized it was a really big deal that showed how they were not listening to or obeying God.

Gretchen

After thinking about our questions for the passage we then spent time sharing what stood out to each of us in the text. Almost all of our observations focused on the relationships between Eli, Samuel, and God.

For me what stood out was that Eli knew that it was God calling Samuel. At first Eli didn't know that it was God calling Samuel. And even after Samuel came multiple times to Eli, Eli could have never realized it was God. I mean, perhaps it was a bad dream. Or maybe Samuel was just sleep walking. Or Eli was talking in his sleep and didn't realize it.

It felt weird to me to consider that God was trying to reach Samuel, but Samuel didn't know it was God. Samuel thought it was Eli calling. Eli, at first, had no clue what was going on. But then Eli realized it was God. It would have been easier and faster, if after the first time, God would have told Eli the message that God had for Eli. If God needed to talk to Eli, why did God need to go talk to Samuel to tell Eli something?

Lacy

What stood out to me was that Samuel listened to Eli and obeyed. So after going to Eli the third time, Eli tells Samuel that God was trying to reach him. So he should go back, lay down, and wait for God to speak to him again. Now, had I been Samuel I would have freaked out! I would have thought "Wait a minute! Who is really calling me? And what is going on? And should I trust Eli? Is it safe to go back and lay down?" I don't think I could have fallen back asleep after that! But Samuel listened to Eli and actually responds when God calls him for the fourth time.

Cindy

Gretchen, Lacy, and I spent time thinking about how Eli needed Samuel, Samuel needed Eli, and how God needed both of them to get God's message delivered. We found it significant that both Eli and Samuel needed to be open to listening to God. If Eli wasn't listening for God, then he would not have known that it was God calling Samuel. If Samuel wasn't listening for God, then he would not have heard the message for Eli, nor been faithful in becoming a prophet for God's people. And, we were amazed that God didn't just use Eli, the one who was the priest,

the older and wiser one. But instead God worked to also use Samuel, the one we are told was a young boy.

Lacy

I think one of the challenges for us today is to consider how we each listen and trust God speaking to each of us. Both Samuel and Eli needed to listen to God's voice, and then trust that it was God talking to them. We each need to do this too. God speaks to all of us if we will listen. Sometimes you could think of God talking to you as also trusting your gut, yourself, and what you think and feel inside.

Recently while my class was taking a test another student in my room was really nervous and didn't know if she was selecting the correct answer or not. She got really upset, worried that she was making a mistake. She raised her hand and the teacher came over to her. She asked the teacher if this answer was correct or not. But since the teacher cannot give you the answer, or tell you if you are right or not, the teacher told her to "Go with your gut."

I don't think that Samuel needed to listen to Eli, but his gut helped him realize that it was the right thing to do. And then his gut helped him realized that it was God when God called again. So I think the challenge for us today is to listen more to ourselves and our gut, because God speaks to us in that way too. For us today we need to consider - what is God telling each of us, and asking us to do? Not thinking about what our friends want us to do, or what our siblings think we should do. Instead we need to pray, listen, and then trust what God tells us, just like Samuel. Just like Eli.

Gretchen

I think another challenge for us today at Waterford is to think about how we all are Samuels and we are all Elis. There are times we are like Eli and we can look at those around us and we can see what God is doing in their lives, sometimes before they can. So being like Eli we

can tell others how we see God in them and in their lives. There are other times that we are like Samuel and we need to help the Elis figure out God's word and message for them.

This means then that we must do as Lacy suggests, and each listen for God's voice within each of us. And the next layer is that we must also pay attention to those around us. Being a Christian begins with my relationship with God, but this relationship needs others too.

What would it look like at Waterford if we worked harder to be Elis and Samuels to each other? This means that we need to first listen to God, and then secondly listen to each other. In the Bible it didn't matter how old you are, how wise you are, or how young you are. God speaks to everyone. I think this happens today at Waterford.

As we leave today, Lacy, Cindy and I challenge each of us to find time to listen to God, and then to look for ways to be Elis and Samuels.

Lacy

How will you be an Eli or Samuel this week at home, work, school, and within our church?

Cindy

May it be so. Amen.