

Disciples Are Life-Long Learners

1 Samuel 3:1-21
Acts 10:34-38

June 3, 2018
Faith Community

Samuel was no ordinary boy. It wasn't just Jesus and John the Baptist who came in the world in an unusual way. Samuel was an answer to prayer. His mother's prayer. Hannah.

When he was born Hannah named him Samuel because it means, "God hears." She took him to the country's center of worship and dedicated him to God's service there.

In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions. (1 Samuel 3:1, TNIV)

What does that look like, do you suppose? How can you tell when the word of the Lord is rare and there's precious little vision? Sometimes it's not that easy.

For example, on the surface it looked fine in Samuel's day. While the timeless ritual was kept in motion, the leadership had lost its way. The sons of Eli, the high priest, were playing fast and loose behind the scenes, helping themselves to whatever people brought to God.

There were also attitudes and assumptions that got in the way. Years earlier Hannah had gone with her husband to the worship center and prayed from the depths of her heart that she might conceive. Eli, the man in charge, was so out of touch that he missed the significance and told her to go home and sober up. He was so caught up in religious trappings that he could not discern the work of God in someone's life.

So the word of the Lord was rare, and there were not many visions. In some ways we continue the pattern.

See if some of these assumptions sound familiar:

After all, the Bible says, "God helps those who help themselves." Actually, the Bible does *not* say that. You will not find that in Scripture.

You know, the Bible says, "Money is the root of all evil." The Bible does *not* say that. Instead, the Bible says, "The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil."

The word of the Lord is also rare when we take a handful of passages that say what we want to hear and disregard the rest.

It breaks my heart to see people go through trials of life with nothing but slogans, assumptions and a handful of Bible passages to hold them up. They've spent a lifetime stuffing themselves on the junk food of organized religion and good intentions. Friends, you and I were made for more than that.

That was the world that Samuel entered. God gave him a hard word that spoke of hard times ahead. That's because:

In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions. (1 Samuel 3:1, TNIV)

In the New Testament, Peter was a new man, being used by God to do great things. However, his was a black and white world. He knew what was right and what was wrong, who was in and who was out, and never the twain shall meet.

Then a man named Cornelius rocked his world by wanting to learn more about the God Peter served. But Cornelius was on the wrong side. Peter wasn't even supposed to be *seen* with people like him. There were strict standards, and he could quote chapter and verse as to why it should stay that way, but then he heard God say to him,

Do not call anything impure that God has made clean. (Acts 10:15)

So Peter meets with Cornelius and new life springs up all over the place:

I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts those from every nation who fear him and do what is right. (vv. 34-35)

Cornelius comes to faith, there's great joy among some people but fear and anger on the part of others. This was hard for Peter, and it got harder when word got out about what he'd done, and he paid a price.

Friends, disciples are lifelong learners. In order for that to happen, disciples must have a courageous vulnerability and openness. Samuel inherited a dangerous situation. Peter paid dearly when he put his discovery to work.

Now for a story of lifelong learning.

Brett Younger is a seminary professor in Atlanta, and he tells of his own experience in this area:

“The year after Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, I was a third grader in Ridgeland, Mississippi. I lived in a segregated world—separate and unequal. Everybody I knew wanted things to stay the way they were. The white people in my hometown didn’t understand what Dr. King preached. We didn’t hear what he heard God say. We didn’t hear God say anything we didn’t want to hear.

“I knew that there were African Americans living nearby, but we went to different schools, stores, post offices, and saddest of all, churches. Then one Friday afternoon our bus driver told us to sit down and get quiet.

“‘Starting on Monday’,” he shouted ‘there will be two black girls riding on our bus.’

Several kids started booing.

“The driver yelled, ‘Get quiet! I don’t like it either, but there’s nothing we can do about it. None of you will have to sit by them. They’ll sit in this seat right behind me.’

“So that’s how it began. Every day for the rest of the year the bus filled from the back with every white child sitting as far as possible from the two children in the front seat.

“It never occurred to me to sit on the second row, say hello, or question our actions. We didn’t think we were bigots. It was just easier to not ask questions.

“It’s easier not to listen to God,” Mr. Younger says, “because listening is dangerous. Samuel grew up in “the church,” helping Eli with chores around the temple—lighting lamps, sweeping the floor, putting the hymnals back in the pew racks. Samuel never thought about listening for God, because no one was listening for God. That’s because,

In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.

“God speaks and gives Samuel disturbing news of big change coming. After he hears God’s voice, Samuel’s life is never the same. It’s harder—much harder!”

Peter was certain of the rightness of his cause, but his own attitudes had to change if the world was going to change, and so Cornelius came calling.

“When he found himself at the center of the civil rights movement, Dr. King was just twenty seven years old and had been pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, for a year. Opposition and threats were gaining traction until one night, around midnight, the phone rang: ‘We’re tired of you, and if you aren’t out of this town in three days, we’re going to blow your brains out and blow up your house.’

Like Samuel, and like Peter, Dr. King prayed that night. He reports hearing a voice calling him to stand up for righteousness, justice, and truth; the voice of Jesus promising to be with him through the fight. Dr. King’s life from that moment on is a testimony to his response to that prayer.

“What would we hear if we listened for God’s voice? Would God tell us to be honest about the prejudices that lie so deep within us that we don’t admit them even to ourselves; to repent from what we find; to let worship penetrate our hearts enough for us to say, like Samuel, ‘Speak God, for I’m listening’; to realize that if racism seems like someone else’s problem then we are part of the problem; to stop waiting for others to take the first step and step across the lines ourselves; to speak with kindness and courage when it would be easier to say nothing....If we listen for God, we’ll hear a dangerous voice telling us to do what’s right.”¹

Samuel, Peter, and Dr. King were lifelong learners. Precisely because of the faith they proclaimed, they went through terribly difficult times and great personal change, and in the process impacted their culture and changed the world.

How about you? In order for your world to change, what in you needs to change?

¹ Brett Younger, *The Courage to Listen*. *Ministry Matters*, December 29, 2014. http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/2223/the-courage-to-listen?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=THE%20COURAGE%20TO%20LISTEN&utm_campaign=Enews%2001132015