

*Christine Kellett  
August 16, 2009*

*I Samuel 3.1-10, Luke 2.41-52*

### *It Takes a Village*

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“There it is again. Someone is calling my name, I know it. Maybe there is something wrong with Eli now. I must go to him.”

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“Well if it is not Eli calling me, then who could it be? It could not be anyone else here in the temple because everyone else is asleep. And of course it is not God. One reason is because I do not really know God and have really never

experienced what God has done. And two, what would God want with me, such a young and inexperienced boy? God would not need me for anything.”

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So God can use all of us. No matter how great or how small we think the task that God has entrusted us with is, we all can make a difference. As Michael tells the children and youth all the time, you are God’s hands and feet in this world. Not tomorrow when you grow up and have a college education, or a job, or enough money to buy your own house. But today as an elementary school aged child, a 16 year old, a college freshmen who loves and cares for the people around you and the rest of God’s creation. **The challenge is**, you have to be willing to listen for God calling you, and you have to be willing, like Samuel, to say “Hear I am Lord. I am not sure what you are calling me to do, but I am here, your servant, ready and willing to do what you would have me to do.”

But all young Samuels need experienced Elis to help them along this journey. In today’s story, the elder Eli is the one who discerns God's voice. Yes, his

spiritual eyes were dim, and he had not heard the word of the Lord in a long time. And he did not even recognize God's voice at first when he did hear it. But he did finally recognize it. And when the young boy Samuel sought answers to his questions, Eli was there to guide him in the right direction. And even with Eli aware of God not being pleased with him and his sons for their waywardness, the wisdom of Eli's old age shines through. In the passages following the ones that we read today, when Samuel is scared to tell Eli his fate, Eli encourages Samuel to tell the truth, no matter how harsh the reality might be. Eli is a great example of a spiritual guide, one that facilitates the student's experience of God and knowledge of God's will. Samuel felt such stirrings and needed Eli to explain to him what they meant. Often, it takes others in our lives, like Eli, to aid us in understanding the call God places before us.

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young boy who was seeking answers to his questions about God. Would Samuel have been able to answer God's call to be a prophet? Maybe. Maybe not. But Eli's role in helping Samuel hear God's voice made it a little easier for God's message to be heard.

I know, I know, you are sitting there saying "Christine, this is a great story, but I am no Eli. I don't have the experience, the knowledge, the know how to lead anyone in knowing God, especially to help someone discern what God is calling them to do I also still have uncertainties, and questions of my own, how can I lead anyone?" Oh, but my friends, that is where you are wrong. In her article "What I know about children, I learned in the Bible" Maren Tirabassi says that the truth that she learns from this story about Samuel and Eli is that "adults-teachers and godparents, pastors and therapists, neighbors, coaches, and friend-need to help children through our society's attention deficit so they recognize (God's) voice." Bringing up a child in faith doesn't have to be heavy-handed. Life in a community of faith is not about having all the answers and knowing exactly what to do. It is a gift, the gift of community, the gift that comforts and sustains. This gift is worth giving to a child, even if you find yourself in the midst of a sea of uncertainty. However, we **must** have people willing to give this gift in order for our children to grow in the likeness of God. Remember, it takes a village to raise our children.

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In conclusion, I want to end with a prayer from Thomas Merton , a 20th Century Roman Catholic mystic, poet, theologian and activist.

My Lord God,  
I have no idea where I am going  
I do not see the road ahead of me.  
I cannot know for certain where it will end.  
Nor do I really know myself,  
And the fact that I think I am following  
your will does not mean that I am  
actually doing so.  
But I believe that the desire to please  
you does in fact please you.  
And I hope that I have that desire in all  
that I am doing.  
And I know that if I do this, you  
will lead me by the right road  
though I may know nothing about it.  
Therefore will I trust you always  
though I may seem to be lost  
and in the shadow of death, I will  
not fear, for you are ever with me  
and you will never leave me  
to face my perils alone.  
Amen.

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Nor do I really know myself,  
And the fact that I think I am following  
your will does not mean that I am  
actually doing so.  
But I believe that the desire to please  
you does in fact please you.  
And I hope that I have that desire in all  
that I am doing.  
And I know that if I do this, you  
will lead me by the right road  
though I may know nothing about it.  
Therefore will I trust you always  
though I may seem to be lost  
and in the shadow of death, I will  
not fear, for you are ever with me  
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to face my perils alone.  
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I do not see the road ahead of me.  
I cannot know for certain where it will end.  
Nor do I really know myself,  
And the fact that I think I am following  
your will does not mean that I am  
actually doing so.  
But I believe that the desire to please  
you does in fact please you.  
And I hope that I have that desire in all  
that I am doing.  
And I know that if I do this, you  
will lead me by the right road  
though I may know nothing about it.  
Therefore will I trust you always  
though I may seem to be lost  
and in the shadow of death, I will  
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Amen.

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When I was in elementary school, one of my favorite games to play with my friends around the lunch table or outside on the playground was telephone. Now, I know that many of you have played this game before. In fact, I believe I have seen it played right here at Park Road Baptist on a Wednesday night around the dinner table. Okay, I **know** that it has been played because I was one of the participants. But for those of you who have not played it in a while, let me take you back and remind you of how it is played. *Well*, why don't I just show you? (get people up front to do telephone) First, you choose someone who is "it". That will be me for this demonstration. That person then thinks up a very clever and extremely hard phrase or sentence. Once that has been accomplished, the "it" then whispers in the ear of the person next to her what the phrase or sentence is. Now it can only be said once and it should be whispered in the ear at a normal speaking speed. There is NO REPEATING!!! Then that person whispers to the person next to them, and then so on and so on until the last person has heard the phrase or sentence. Let's give it a try and see if the last person hears what was originally said!!! (the phrase will be "My Funny friend has freckles that are found

on her fantastic face.” ) . (Just what I thought, the message that was originally sent was not what the last person heard.) Thank you for you participation.

Like this timeless and fun filled children’s game, there are many times in our lives that we receive information, maybe by phone, letter, email, or word of mouth, and we are not sure if we are *really* hearing what has been said. There may have even been times that we are not even sure if the one who is “calling” us is someone that we know. Even with the newest technologies of caller ID, Facebook “friends”, and Twitter followers (okay I will not even pretend to know what that is) all of which are suppose to help us identify the source from which our information comes from, there are still many times that we feel lost and confused on ***what is truth*** and if the person speaking this “truth” is trustworthy.

In some ways, that is how Samuel must have felt in the story that we have already talked about this morning. Generations of us learned the story of God’s call to Samuel in the night as young children. The Church has cherished this story—and no wonder. It is a believable story. There are no angels, no burning bushes, no water turned to blood: just a boy in the dark, and someone calling his name, that’s all. It’s also a story that suggests that the presence of God isn’t always obvious. In the days that Samuel was a young boy, the word of the Lord

was rare and prophecy was scarce. Samuel was also not familiar with the Lord.

Therefore, it was only natural that as the young boy lay there in the dark ready to serve Eli, his elder and mentor, that when Samuel heard his name, he thought it was Eli. Never did it cross his mind that it was God calling to him, especially since he was so young.

“Who is that calling me?” Samuel says to himself. “Of course, it is my elder, my teacher Eli. I must go to him and see if he needs me.”

But as Samuel goes to him, Eli tells the boy that he did not call and that he should go back to sleep.

“I thought I heard my name. But I guess I am imagining things.” Samuel says to himself as he goes back to his bed.

“There it is again. Someone is calling my name, I know it. Maybe there is something wrong with Eli now. I must go to him.”

Eli once again tells Samuel that he has not called him and to return to his bed.

“Well if it is not Eli calling me, then who could it be? It could not be anyone else here in the temple because everyone else is asleep. And of course it is not God. One reason is because I do not really know God and have really never

experienced what God has done. And two, what would God want with me, such a young and inexperienced boy? God would not need me for anything.”

There are many of us sitting here today, especially children and youth, who cannot imagine what God might need with us. I am just a child, I don't have any experience, only adults can really make a difference in this world, I am just the future of the church, not the present, my voice is not strong enough to be heard. Well, I am here to tell you today, young Samuels, this is far from the truth.

Every summer, I have the awesome opportunity to take either one or two weeks out of my summer to spend it with our incredible youth group. Now, I know I am a little biased when it comes to my kids, **I mean our kids**, but I have heard from many other youth ministers and adults not in our church that our youth group is pretty spectacular. Just a few months ago, I had the privilege of going with our group to Richmond, VA for our annual mission trip. While on this trip, a few of our guys worked on an elderly woman's house that did not have the money or the physical capacity to make her house a home again. So, our guys stepped up to the challenge and repainted her entire house, did some yard work, and made the place look like new. On the last day that they were at her house, the lady came out the door with a smile on her face and tears in her eyes and said

“Thank you. You will never know how much this truly means to me. You are all truly a blessing to me.” As they were leaving, one of our very own asked her for her address so that he could write to her, knowing that she was very lonely and needed a friend. When telling this story, the young man who was so kind to recognize this need said that in that moment he definitely felt the presence of God.

So God can use all of us. No matter how great or how small we think the task that God has entrusted us with is, we all can make a difference. As Michael tells the children and youth all the time, you are God’s hands and feet in this world. Not tomorrow when you grow up and have a college education, or a job, or enough money to buy your own house. But today as an elementary school aged child, a 16 year old, a college freshmen who loves and cares for the people around you and the rest of God’s creation. **The challenge is**, you have to be willing to listen for God calling you, and you have to be willing, like Samuel, to say “Hear I am Lord. I am not sure what you are calling me to do, but I am here, your servant, ready and willing to do what you would have me to do.”

But all young Samuels need experienced Elis to help them along this journey. In today’s story, the elder Eli is the one who discerns God's voice. Yes, his

spiritual eyes were dim, and he had not heard the word of the Lord in a long time. And he did not even recognize God's voice at first when he did hear it. But he did finally recognize it. And when the young boy Samuel sought answers to his questions, Eli was there to guide him in the right direction. And even with Eli aware of God not being pleased with him and his sons for their waywardness, the wisdom of Eli's old age shines through. In the passages following the ones that we read today, when Samuel is scared to tell Eli his fate, Eli encourages Samuel to tell the truth, no matter how harsh the reality might be. Eli is a great example of a spiritual guide, one that facilitates the student's experience of God and knowledge of God's will. Samuel felt such stirrings and needed Eli to explain to him what they meant. Often, it takes others in our lives, like Eli, to aid us in understanding the call God places before us.

Growing up, every time the doors of my home church were open, my family and I were always there, and **I am not even a preacher's kid like some that we know!!!** From the moment that I was born, church was a part of my life. And with this came some very important and influential people, other than my parents, that guided me along my life's spiritual journey. There was Mrs. Hunter, my preschool Sunday School teacher who loved me, nurtured me, and created the foundation for my understanding of God. There were my youth ministers, Paul

Frey and Mike Smith, who encouraged me to ask questions and begin to create of faith that I could call my own. There was my high school Sunday school teacher, Jack Childress, who brought the stories in the Bible to life and made them applicable to my life as a teenager. And even when I left for college and began to really consider a career in the ministry, Frank Smith, the Minister of Youth at FBC Greenville, SC, and Vic Greene, the assistant director of the Church Related Vocations program at Furman University, were there to assist me in discerning whether or not the church was where God was calling me to be.

I am sure that many of you have your Mrs. Hunters and Mike Smiths who have been an encourager, a supporter, a teacher, and a friend through the years. Those people who did the little things for you, rocked you in the nursery, taught you the story of David and Goliath, took you on mission trips, helped you through a breakup, celebrated with you at your graduation, attended your wedding, sent you a card when your children were born. The people in your community of faith, or just in the community around you, that loved you for you. That is all. Now think for a moment what your life would look like and where would you be today if it had not been for those people?(pause) Where would Samuel have ended up if it had not been for Eli? Not Eli the hero, but Eli the ordinary person with all the frailties of being human, but the one who knew enough about God to guide a

young boy who was seeking answers to his questions about God. Would Samuel have been able to answer God's call to be a prophet? Maybe. Maybe not. But Eli's role in helping Samuel hear God's voice made it a little easier for God's message to be heard.

I know, I know, you are sitting there saying "Christine, this is a great story, but I am no Eli. I don't have the experience, the knowledge, the know how to lead anyone in knowing God, especially to help someone discern what God is calling them to do I also still have uncertainties, and questions of my own, how can I lead anyone?" Oh, but my friends, that is where you are wrong. In her article "What I know about children, I learned in the Bible" Maren Tirabassi says that the truth that she learns from this story about Samuel and Eli is that "adults-teachers and godparents, pastors and therapists, neighbors, coaches, and friend-need to help children through our society's attention deficit so they recognize (God's) voice." Bringing up a child in faith doesn't have to be heavy-handed. Life in a community of faith is not about having all the answers and knowing exactly what to do. It is a gift, the gift of community, the gift that comforts and sustains. This gift is worth giving to a child, even if you find yourself in the midst of a sea of uncertainty. However, we **must** have people willing to give this gift in order for our children to grow in the likeness of God. Remember, it takes a village to raise our children.

So where does this leave us young Samuels and older Eli's? To the children and youth sitting before me, I challenge you to be ready and waiting to hear what God has to say to you. Keep your lamps lit, your eyes and your ears open, and your hearts willing to follow God. Know that you are not just the future of the world, but you are the present. There are so many things that you can be doing today if you are just willing. Also, be open to the advice that those with more knowledge and experience have for you. Know that they come with love and support for you and your ministry to this world.

And for the adults before me. Come and follow Jesus by being the mentor, the teacher, the chaperone, the listener, the friend. There are many that need your wisdom. There are those just waiting to be taught. They need you. And even if you encounter uncertainties and questions along the way, maybe you can struggle and find out the answers together. Be that person that allows someone to ask you about the voice that they have heard in the night, and be the person willing to tell them to say "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

In conclusion, I want to end with a prayer from Thomas Merton , a 20th Century Roman Catholic mystic, poet, theologian and activist.

My Lord God,  
I have no idea where I am going  
I do not see the road ahead of me.  
I cannot know for certain where it will end.  
Nor do I really know myself,  
And the fact that I think I am following  
your will does not mean that I am  
actually doing so.  
But I believe that the desire to please  
you does in fact please you.  
And I hope that I have that desire in all  
that I am doing.  
And I know that if I do this, you  
will lead me by the right road  
though I may know nothing about it.  
Therefore will I trust you always  
though I may seem to be lost  
and in the shadow of death, I will  
not fear, for you are ever with me  
and you will never leave me  
to face my perils alone.  
Amen.