

"Speak, Lord, for Your Servant is Listening"

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Epiphany, Sunday, January 14, 2018

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Holy Scriptures: I Samuel 3: 1-20 John 1: 43-51

1 Samuel 3

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.

² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³ 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. ⁴ Then the Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" ⁵ and 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. ⁶ The 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." ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ The 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. ⁹ Therefore 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.

¹⁰ Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." ¹¹ Then 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. ¹² On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. ¹³ For 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. ¹⁴ Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering forever."

¹⁵ Samuel lay there until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. ¹⁶ But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." He said, "Here I am." ¹⁷ Eli 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." ¹⁸ So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. Then he said, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him."

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

John 1: 43-51

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸ Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." ⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰ Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹ And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Invitation to Trust

On the first day the county fair opened, an Amish farmer offered a horse for sale. A local farmer who was not Amish,

but thought highly of the Amish people,
asked the price of the horse.

He bought the horse, paying the full price without hesitation

based on his trust of his Amish neighbors.

The farmer got the horse home, only to discover it was ill-tempered.

The next day he returned the ill-tempered horse to the county fair.

There he confronted the Amish farmer.

The Amish farmer said, "*Thou hast no complaint against me.*"

*Had thou asked me about the horse,
I would have told thee truthfully the problems,
that it was ill-tempered. Thou didst not ask."*

"That's okay," replied the farmer. "I don't want you to take the horse back.

*I'm going to sell the horse to someone else.
Say, friend, can I borrow your hat and coat?"*

Invitation to Trust

"There is one thing that is common

to every [person], team, family, organization,
nation, economy, and civilization throughout the world—
one thing which, if removed,
will destroy the most powerful government,
the most successful business,
the most thriving economy,
the most influential leadership,
the greatest friendship,
the strongest character,
the deepest love.

"On the other hand,

if developed and leveraged, [prayed over and encouraged]
that one thing has the potential to create unparalleled [wholeness, shalom]
in every dimension of life.

Yet, it is the most misunderstood, most neglected,

and most underestimated possibility of our time.

"That one thing is trust." (Covey, P. 1)

Trust under girds every relationship, communication, work place, family home.

"...Trust is not some soft, illusive quality

that you either have or you don't.

Rather, trust is a pragmatic, tangible, actionable asset that you can create..." (Covey)

Trust is something we can do something about.

Simply put, trust means confidence.

The opposite of trust—distrust—is suspicion.

When you trust someone, you have confidence in him or her,

in his or her abilities and integrity.

When you distrust someone,

when you are apprehensive,
you are suspicious of agendas, integrity, capabilities, track records.

We have all had experiences

that validate the difference between relationships built on trust
and those that are not.

We know from experience the difference is never small; *it is dramatic.*

Consider the last time you misspoke or miswrote a note to someone,

someone with whom you have a high level of shared, mutual trust.

You said the wrong thing,

and yet your meaning was still understood.

Folks moved on.

Friendships held strong.

However, in a low-trust relationship say the right word and be very measured,

you still might be made to walk the plank.

Say a wrong word or mess up in a text or email in a low-trust relationship,

well, fuhgeddaboutit.

In the business world they say that it only takes a second

to lose trust, which leads to losing a customer, losing a deal, losing out.
Trust, once broken, damaged, lost, stolen or strayed,
may seem to have been crushed, cast out, cast off, cast away, gone, lost forever.

People of faith, we know another story, another side, a deeper joy, a greater hope.

Trust can be created; broken trust is repairable.

Trust can be created, fostered, enhanced, rebuilt, and celebrated.

Trust is a gift of God, given freely and deeply into every soul.

Trust and faith go hand in hand,

so close, so intimate, so bonded, as personal as our connection with the holy.

Invitation to Trust

In First Samuel we overhear the call of young Samuel,

a call to trust,
a call to live into that trust by serving in his wider community.

Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!"

And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

*Then 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."*

As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him

and let none of his words fall to the ground.

And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba

knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord.

In the Gospel of John, we are witnesses of first the call of Philip,

who then invited his friend Nathanael to go with him to meet the Living God.

⁴⁶ *Nathanael said to Philip, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"
Philip said to him, "Come and see."*

*When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him,
"Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!"*

Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?"

Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you."

Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

*Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree?
You will see greater things than these."*

*And Jesus said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened
and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."*

Does that remind you of how Jesus responded to the Disciples

when they returned from going out in pairs
to serve and minister in God's name, telling Him, "O.M.G! It works!"

And He said, "I saw Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lighting." (Luke 10: 17)

Relationships grounded in God's energy and grace become transcendent.

The love you share and the relationships you build are cosmic.

Jesus said to the disciples, "You will see heaven opened."

God said to young Samuel that the Lord's words would not fall to the ground.

Are you like me, thinking, you know, that sounds an awful lot like what God said when God called the Prophet Isaiah:

*"So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55: 11)*

Faith is cosmic.

Faith is transformational.

Faith is relational.

Trust is at the core of faith,

which has been planted in your soul to grow roots and bloom.

Such roots and fruits are the foundation of healthy relationships.

“Those who hear are offered the invitation to trust, to “come and see.””

(Craddock, p. 121)

Jesus said to Nathanael and Philip and to you and me,

“Follow me! Trust me. Join me while we follow in the Way of the Lord.”

God said to Samuel, “See, I am about to do a new thing in Israel!” Trust me.

Celtic expression: *“Heaven and earth are only three feet apart;
in the thin places that distance is even smaller.”*

Invitation to Trust

What is the most precious thing

anyone ever asked you to watch over, to take care of, to protect and treasure?

Their baby?

Your grandchildren for an hour, a day, a weekend?

A child for a week of summer camp?

Has someone asked you to watch their home?

Their cat or dog or fish in the aquarium in the living room?

Anyone trust you with their PIN or password?

If you've seen the list of the top ten passwords people use,

then you know they're 2-4-6-8, 1-3-5-7-9, & the incredibly complex 1-2-3-4-5.

My favorite is P A S S W O R D

I wish I was making this up.

At a key moment in your life someone put their trust in you.

Someone trusted you

with that which was most precious, most valuable,
most treasured to him or her.

Someone in your history trusted you with the Good News.

Someone trusted you so much she or he told you about the God of forgiving love.

Take the initiative:

Is there a soul in your midst within reach of your voice and words of grace

whom you can trust with the Word of God?

Take this into consideration:

Is there soul in the world whom you cannot trust to hear about the love of God?

Trust God to be with you as you speak the Word and build relationships.

Someone once trusted you.

Have confidence in the loving spirit the dwells within.

Isn't that what trust is, confidence?

A confidence that the Good Lord has already given to you, to hold and to share.

When you were baptized--or choose to be baptized--with the same water as Christ,

you were--or will be--ordained into God's ministry of grace.

When you are ordained,

people trust you because of who and whose you are.

When you are ordained,

people will invite you into their lives,
into their brokenness and loss,
into their aspirations and celebrations.

When you are ordained,

people entrust to your care
their most precious memories, stories, moments, hopes.

Invitation to Trust

The phone rang, and I rolled over to see what time it was before picking it up.

Jordan, a church member, was on the line.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, James. I'm calling to say good bye."

Jordan went on to tell me he had had enough; he was going to end his life.

I said, *"Please, please wait until at least I get there so we can pray one more time."*

The front door was ajar.

I found him sitting on his couch with a grim look on his face and a .45 in his hand.

He shared he had problems, problems at home,

his marriage was broken and breaking up,
that no one else cared,
and there was only one thing left to do.

We talked and talked until finally his hand on the gun relaxed.

I invited him to kindly remove the bullets.

They clattered onto the coffee table.

I picked up a single bullet in my left hand, and held it out to Jordan.

"This is, indeed, a possible choice, an option in your control," I said.
"You may have this bullet back. God has another option for you."

I reached out my right hand to him, and said, "*Jordan, in this hand is hope.*"

I cannot promise that your family challenges will be resolved easily or quickly.

*I can promise you that your church and your God
will walk with you and love you.*

*You are not alone. In that you can trust.
You have the power to choose: death or hope."*

Jordan reached out.

Suddenly he grabbed my right hand, empty yet filled,

our two hands beholden and being held.

I began to pray, and as we did so, we both shed tears of relief.

It was still dark outside when I got up to leave.

I asked Jordan if I could take the other bullets,

and he gave a wave of his hand, and said,
"Sure, take 'em. In the chest behind you I have boxes of them."

All the color must have left my face, because he said,
"Don't worry, my friend. I promise to be alive in the morning."

In God's own timing and grace,

Jordan and his family worked out their challenges and rediscovered joy.

The trust he believed irreparable was repaired.

The relationship he deemed lost was found.

The life he considered taking was reborn, again.

To this day, I have the .45 caliber bullet that was his death option,

and I have the right hand of hope.

Both serve as vivid, visual, and *veritas* reminders

of the God-given power we carry within to love, to have mercy, to live into our trust.

My friends, trust yourself to share the Word that God has given to you.

Do so, be so, say so, and "...you will see the heavens open
and the angels of God ascending and descending..."

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

Extra Material

"Speak well about something that matters much to the speaker and the listener."

--James Childs

"Witnessing is more than words, of course, but it is not less than words. Those who discount the value of spoken words are often seeking to avoid the most difficult of human endeavors: speaking appropriately about subjects profoundly important to both speaker and listener." (Craddock, Pp. 127-128)

"The imperative of a life of Christian witness

*flows from the grace of God's initiative,
God's "yes" to us." (James Childs)*

Martin Buber: *"Where is God? God is between people."*