

The boy Samuel served the LORD in Eli's presence. In those days the word of the LORD was rare and prophetic visions were not widespread.

² One day Eli, whose eyesight was failing, was lying in his usual place. ³ Before the lamp of God had gone out, Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was located.

⁴ Then the LORD called Samuel,^[a] and he answered, "Here I am." ⁵ He ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

"I didn't call," Eli replied. "Go back and lie down." So he went and lay down.

⁶ Once again the LORD called, "Samuel!"

Samuel got up, went to Eli, and said, "Here I am; you called me."

"I didn't call, my son," he replied. "Go back and lie down."

⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, because the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ Once again, for the third time, the LORD called Samuel. He got up, went to Eli, and said, "Here I am; you called me."

Then Eli understood that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ He told Samuel, "Go and lie down. If he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ The LORD came, stood there, and called as before, "Samuel, Samuel!"

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

Rare and Precious

As a child baseball cards were an important part of our local economy. The neighborhood kids would gather together, bring out our collections, compare, and trade cards. Sometimes it was cards for cards. Sometimes it was multiple cards for a special single. And at other times it was a full set of cards for a game. But some cards were worth more than others. Everyone wanted one of them. The baseball cards that weren't rare, those of which we had many, and those that we didn't recognize were placed against the edge of our bike tire or even set to ride against the spokes so our mouths would get a break from making motorcycle sounds as we'd rode around town.

Then we read something like this, "The Word of the LORD was rare and prophetic visions were not widespread." But the kids weren't trading high priest, priests, or Torah cards. At least there is no mention of it. However, it looks like the priests have a scroll stuck between the spokes of their camel and they didn't care about it.

The Word of the LORD was rare. That's probably not what you would expect. I imagined that it would be so much easier to hear God's voice, to believe his promises, if only we were alive in the BC era. Maybe you've felt the same way. But Samuel reminds us, life among God's people wasn't easy. They were without the Word. They didn't have a complete NT or even the full OT as we have it. Access to the Word of God was a rare thing. If anything, we see in this lesson the damage done by failed leadership who withheld the Word from God's people.

Access to God's Word is different today, but it is no less precious. And faithful preaching can be considered rare. Many preachers come and proclaim, "You need to do this and that for Jesus! You need to serve him!" God's Word however is God-centered not man-centered. While there is some truth in the need for fruits of faith, Christianity isn't about your need to do. Christianity is about Jesus for you. May we remember these rare and precious truths and cherish them.

It was toward the end of the time of the Judges, when people did as they saw fit, turning away from the Lord toward greater and greater evil. Enemies oppressed the Israelites and God delivered them, but Israel kept turning back to false gods. Failed leaders like Eli's sons are described as, "wicked." Although they were priests, they desecrated the Lord's sacrifices, not allowing people to offer them in the proper way. They slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tabernacle. And all Eli did was talk to them. He did not punish them, remove them from office, or have them publically punished. These were dark days for God's people. Even Eli appears incompetent as he accuses Hannah of being drunk while quietly praying for a child. God answered her prayer and she dedicated her son, Samuel, to the LORD. In Chapter two Eli's sons are compared and contrasted with Samuel. In chapter three we see the decline of Eli and the rise of Samuel.

The author sets the scene with, “*One day Eli, whose eyesight was failing, was lying in his usual place. Before the lamp of God had gone out, Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the Ark of God was located.* Eli’s sight is failing. That means he can no longer attend to the duties as high priest. He can’t read or study Torah. He can’t serve before the LORD. He can’t tend to the lamp of God nor depend on his derelict sons to do so. So Samuel *lays down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was located.* The writer qualifies the location to where Samuel was lying down. Samuel isn’t where he should be. He’s not the High Priest but he was v. 1 “*servicing the Lord in Eli’s presence.*”

One can say, “These are indeed dark times for God’s people.” Who knows what if any instruction he has received from Eli? Samuel’s heart seems in the right place even if he is lying in the wrong place, and God comes to him and calls him by name: “Samuel.” Samuel doesn’t know the voice. He runs to Eli because he can’t see and Eli isn’t going to come to him. He runs to Eli because who else would be calling him. *Samuel did not yet know the LORD, because the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.* That doesn’t mean Samuel didn’t believe or didn’t know anything about the LORD. It means that he has never heard God speak to him. But God continues to call. and Eli finally realizes, “It’s the LORD.” The third time he is instructed to answer, “Speak LORD for your servant is listening.” The rare and precious word is revealed to him.

How do you think Eli felt about that? Earlier in chapter two an anonymous “Man of God” came to deliver a message from the LORD to him. God accuses him, “*Why, then, do all of you despise my sacrifices and offerings that I require at the place of worship. You have honored your sons more than me...*” But since that time the LORD had been silent. He had been waiting for a word from the LORD. Maybe he had hoped the LORD had changed his mind. Maybe Eli was relieved that the Word of the LORD came to Samuel. Maybe he was happy because he could finally get back to sleep. The Word of the LORD was rare.

We have the peculiar privilege of having and holding onto our own bible. You and I hold a precious treasure that only a few hundred years earlier would have been thought impossible. What did Samuel have? The first five books and maybe Joshua and even then only certain people had access to them. The Lord was still revealing his plan through the ages. That’s why he would reveal things in dreams and visions. But today God no longer promises to speak to us in those ways because we have God’s full revelation written down for us. That means you don’t have to go to Shiloh, Jerusalem or any other sacred space. You don’t have to wait for a priest or Levite to read God’s law on a festival day. You can open up an app, pick up multiple copies off your shelf. But before the invention of the printing press, at the time of Luther, no one had a bible. In some places the Word is still so rare it must be smuggled to them, tied to balloons and flown over into North Korea. The Word of God is not a right it is a tremendous privilege.

We have so much access to God’s Word that it seems common to us. And often that’s the way we treat it. We can’t be bothered to read it or interrupt our weekend to hear it preached and proclaimed. It will be there next week or the week after. There are countries where Christians are risking their life simply to hear and hold what you have in your phone. I’m guilty too. I have a Bible, but I assume, “I already know that. I’m studying for Sunday. I can’t be bothered with reading.” (I had to stop and read my bible at this point. I’m behind).

In many ways we deserve to have the Word of God removed from us like Eli and his sons. We haven’t listened to the Lord and I doubt we are as excited to serve as Samuel was to serve. But God still comes to us. It’s a valuable thing, rare, precious. Even if we are ignorant about the worth of the cards rubbing against the tire or spokes on our bike they still remained valuable.

Samuel wasn’t perfect, (he repeats Eli’s error and appoints his own sons to succeed him. Like Eli’s sons, they turn out to be greedy and corrupt (1 Sam. 8:1-3)) he didn’t have the best role models. He was a young boy raised by and adopted by father Eli. But God came to him. *The LORD came, stood there, and called as before, “Samuel, Samuel.”* Samuel is addressed in a twofold way. This is a Hebrew expression of intimacy. The LORD came and stood before

1 Samuel 3:1-10

2nd Sunday after Epiphany

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Samuel and called him into service. He will be the next prophet at a young age. He will proclaim God's Word because he has rejected Eli and his Sons. God is determined to reveal himself through his Word even in this time when his Word is rare. The LORD will not let his people go without his Word. He will punish those who have withheld his Word and he will find a way to come to his people. Since the beginning of time God speaks to his people. He wants to be with them.

Which is why he came down the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. Jesus came into this world to be with his people and restore them to God. I wonder if Jesus fell asleep before the ark of the LORD when his parents left him in Jerusalem. I wonder if that is where he spent his time in his Father's house. Jesus had to be there dutifully listening to the Word of God because we haven't. He needed to fulfill the law for us and for Eli. He had to come. He came for Philip. He came for Nathanael. Every single soul matters to Jesus. He doesn't treat them like the unknown baseball card.

He knows you by name. You're not just another number. You are one for whom Christ died. And he wants to spend time with you. He wants to come to you in his Word and tell you what he's done for you. He's always there waiting even if he has to call to us multiple times and we go running off in a different direction. He continues to call to us. Proclaiming through pastors, teachers, parents that he has indeed lived the perfect life and taken the punishment you deserve. You may look like the card that has gone through the spokes of a bike but you are a precious blood bought soul made mint by the blood of the lamb.

God has given us his Word. He has given us his Son. He has given us the Sacraments were he reassures us again and again. Look to your baptism – because it takes your eyes off of you and what you can do for Jesus and places them back on him. Look to the sacraments where you are reminded, "This is for you for the forgiveness of your sins." Look to his Word where he tells us what he has done for you. We're beginning a stewardship series. The great thing about Lutheranism is we can talk about stewardship without even bringing up money. Let's talk about your vocation. How do you serve the LORD?

First and foremost, serving the LORD begins by listening to his Word, hearing what he has to say. First spend some time getting to know the LORD and his love for you so you can serve with a heart full of gratitude and joy. God doesn't guilt you when you blow the dust off and open up his Word, the church won't condemn you for stepping foot into our doors, we'll be glad you came. Maybe you'll take something home to share with your friends and family.

I've got some baseball card. I even have a Tom Henke to put in your bike spokes. I don't know why we chose him. I do know why God chose you. It wasn't because you were mint, or you had done all the right things for Jesus but it was because of his great love. His Word is rare. It's precious. But God still came to us. Amen.