**2nd June 2024**

**1 Samuel 3:1-20**

**Call to worship**

The psalmist wrote, saying to God:
it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.
Let us come to God today with our hearts and minds
full of the same confidence and praise.
We too are made and called by God.

**A gathering prayer**

Open our minds, O God;
open our hearts, O Christ;
open our souls, O Spirit;
that we might hear your call afresh,
respond with enthusiasm and commitment,
working together to build your kingdom,
to your praise and glory.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of approach**

‘I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.‘I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful
are your works; that I know very well.’ (Psalm 139:14)
Listening and all-powerful God, we come before you now.
We want to see you with our eyes, hear you with our ears,
understand you with our minds, love you with our hearts.
We open ourselves before you.
We long for a deeper experience of you in our lives.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of adoration**

Lord God, you spoke to Samuel in the middle of the night.
He needed Eli’s help to hear you; but you persisted till he heard.
Lord, you speak to us – sometimes directly, the middle of the night
is good! – sometimes through others, and that can be equally
unexpected and amazing.
You speak, you persist.
Where would we be without you, most patient Lord?
**Amen.**

**A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness**

**A prayer of confession**

For the times we only listen with half an ear – if that; the times we are the one being called, but we’re just not open enough to hear it.
**Forgive us, Lord, and open our ears to your wisdom.**
For the times we doubt something is your word to us, because
we’re not tuned in to you; or perhaps because it comes from an
unlikely source.
**Forgive us, Lord, and open our ears to your wisdom.**
When we don’t give people the benefit of the doubt; when we
think they are too young, too old, too different.
**Forgive us, Lord, and open our ears to your wisdom.**
For the times we might give wrong advice, not because we want
to, but we don’t hear you clearly enough.
**Forgive us, Lord, and open our ears to your wisdom.** **Amen.**

**Assurance of forgiveness**

We imagine the Lord standing before us, arms outstretched,
forgiving us. Let us spend a moment silently thanking God for the power in that forgiveness.
Thank you, God, for your blessing, and that we can go out as new.
Nothing is hidden from you, and if we acknowledge that, and
confess our sins, we know you will forgive us and lead us further into you.
**Amen**

**A prayer of praise and thanksgiving**

Lord God, we thank you for speaking to Samuel;
and for speaking to us.
We thank you for the Elis in our lives; how they point us to God and
listen even when the message is uncomfortable.
Thank you for each one of us here in church today; as we are
open to you and each other, we can do great things in your name.
**Amen.**

**A prayer for all ages together**

We open our hearts to God.
(hands on chest then spread wide)
And we open our minds, too.
(hands on head then spread wide)
We open our hearts to all who do God’s work.
(hands on chest, spread wide and look around)
We open our minds to see God at work everywhere.
(hands on head, spread wide and look around)
And we thank God for all the good that is done.
**Amen.**
(praying hands)

**A sending out prayer**

Go in the name of the Lord
to your homes, your neighbours, your communities.
Go and make a difference.
Raise up those who are disheartened.
Tell others about the risen Christ.
Visit those who are lonely,
and may your heart and mind be open
to receive all that God gives to you and asks of you.
**Amen.**

God reaches out to us in so many ways,
in beauty around us and silence within,
stirring us to action or helping us wait.
Let us reach out to God now
and give ourselves space to see, feel and hear the call.

**Chat and catch  W E A**

**Think about how we listen and look at things.**

You will need: a soft ball, suitable for indoor use.

* Do some simple throwing and catching in the group. Talk together about the best way to catch a ball. Surely it’s not simply a matter of holding out your hands. Maybe it helps to turn towards the person throwing the ball and to watch carefully? And how about keeping your eye on the ball and concentrating? And what about the way we move ourselves and our hands when the ball reaches us?
* Rachel Turner, in the ‘[parenting for faith](https://www.parentingforfaith.brf.org.uk/author/rachel-turner/)’ material, suggests that the best way to catch a ball is similar to the way we need to listen and look for God. What do you think she means?

**Meet the dog!  E S**

A chance to think about being called in a partnership of trust.

* If you know someone who has a working sheepdog or a guide dog, you could ask if they could tell your group about the way in which they work with the dog and their relationship with the animal. (‘[Thought for the week](https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2024/129-january-february-2024-b/epiphany-2/explore-and-respond/aaa-explore-and-respond#thought)’)

Even whistles at different pitches or a wave of the hand can mean a particular command to a sheep dog. For a sheep dog to operate successfully there is a partnership and trust based on years of training and a relationship between animal and owner. The commands may be difficult sometimes, but the owner knows the strengths and weaknesses of the animal and knows its capabilities. If the dog is young and inexperienced, the owner will maybe work the dog alongside a more experienced animal, and will not push a younger animal too hard. The trust and affection between dog and handler is something beautiful to see, and is very effective in achieving the desired result. If the owner were simply to shout commands at the dog, without the partnership between them, the results would mean a scattering rather than gathering or directing of the sheep. And we might also note that not all commands are for action. Sometimes a dog needs to wait for the next call. Rushing ahead could mean the opposite result from that required.

Draw a picture or enlarge a picture of different types of animal’s ears
have some fun guessing which ear belongs to which animal. End with the picture of a human ear.

Summarize the Old Testament story of God calling Samuel and the call of Philip from the Gospel reading. Where do we hear the call of God today?Take the picture of the ear to the following places:

-the lectern - with the Word of God we hear God’s call in God’s Word
-the choir – we hear God’s call in music and song, from our hymns and prayers when we stop long enough to listen.
-The congregation - we hear God’s call through friends and family comforting us guiding us nurturing us.
-the door – we hear God’s call in the most unexpected places, from people we have just met,
-a TV guide or newspaper - God might speak to us from movies we see and newspapers we read.

Bring the ear back to the front of the church and hold it against your heart.."And we hear God calling from within. " Rev David Cameron

3. Play "follow the leader" with the children. As the children walk behind you, following you, sing this song to the tune of *Frere Jacques*:
*Come and follow, come and follow,
Me today. Me today.
Follow me where I go, follow me where I go.
One and all. One and all.*

**1 Samuel 3:1-20 John 1.43-51**

The songwriter Richard M Sherman died at the age of 95 on 25 May this year. He and his brother were responsible for some wonderful songs such as [*Chitty, Chitty, Bang, Bang*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZTTzcXSLjhI) (from the musical of the same name), [*I wanna be like you*](https://disney.fandom.com/wiki/I_Wan%27na_Be_Like_You?file=I_Wanna_Be_Like_You_%28Sing_Along_Songs%29-2#Videos) (*Jungle Book*) and, from *Mary Poppins*, the sublime [A s*poonful of sugar*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6o0WuaZOLo). (I would have mentioned S*upercalifragilisticexpialidocious* but I don’t trust the spell checker.) [[1]](#endnote-1)

Musing on the lyrics in *A spoonful of sugar* I remembered how it informed us that in every job that must be done there is an element of fun - you find the fun and snap the job’s a game.

In every job that must be done
There is an element of fun
You find the fun and snap!
The job's a game

And every task you undertake
Becomes a piece of cake
A lark! A spree! It's very clear to see that

A Spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down
The medicine go down-wown
The medicine go down
Just a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down
In a most delightful way

I wonder if the prophet Samuel would agree with that. He was told by God that God was going to punish Eli and his family. When asked by Eli what God’s message had been, although Samuel had been afraid to tell Eli, he did not hesitate to inform him. That cannot have been easy for the young boy who did not even recognise that it was God who was calling him.

Yet, reading on in the books that bear his name, Samuel appears to have been unfailingly faithful and obedient throughout his life. I doubt he would describe the role of a prophet as having an element of fun but I am sure there was job satisfaction. Those whom God calls he also equips and those who are equipped by God know his presence, support and encouragement in the role they pursue. I think that’s better than a spoonful of sugar.

How do we hear the call of God in our own lives?

In the Samuel Bible passage, the boy responds to his call in the night. Once the priest Eli assures Samuel that it is God who is calling him, he is ready and listens to what God asks. And so begins a remarkable life for Samuel, sharing God’s word and leading people in to God’s ways.

How might God be calling you to a new thing; a response which takes courage but could lead to something of beauty?

Back in 2014 I completed a master’s degree in Christian spirituality so I’ll include some pithy sayings on spirituality today!

**St Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)**
**If you wish to see: listen. Hearing is a step towards vision.**

**Quote: Soren Kierkegaard Christina philosopher of the 19th century**
**To pray does not mean to listen to oneself speaking. Prayer involves becoming silent, and being silent, and waiting until God is heard.**

Samuel’s call offers many pointers to how God may be speaking to us today and revealing himself.

**First of all God speaks to all people and that includes children**. God speaks to children and asks them to share the message with others. You don’t have to wait until you grow up.

Children are so precious. In the time of Samuel they were not given the same status as they are today – they were treated as nobodies. They were not seen as belonging to their parents but rather were viewed as a gift from God. Hence Samuel as a boy is taken by his mother to be raised in the temple and to serve the priest Eli.

Sometimes I think children have become too precious today. We expect too much from them and we are overly anxious about whether they’re achieving what they should achieve. If we are not careful we will squeeze the life out of our children. The teachers are already on life support.

Children are too precious to be precious about.

**Secondly Samuel found himself in a place to hear God**.

Crucially we all need space, rest, silence, room for contemplation, an environment that fosters the spirit – if you hothouse children too much you boil them up and they become too dry for any good.

Likewise in ourselves – if we become too intense, too driven, and too busy – we are in danger of ending up dry and exhausted. How do we nourish our spiritual lives?

Samuel found himself in the temple. He slept in the room with the Ark of the Covenant – the symbol of God’s presence. If we want to hear God then it’s more likely that we will hear God if we put ourselves more consciously in places where we are more likely to hear.

.*‘God is always present to us, but we are not always present to him’ (Julian of Norwich*)

This is not just about going to church and being in worship – but that is important – taking time out to stop, reflect, pray, refocus, intentionally come into God’s presence.

But it could be taking time out during the day, starting the day in prayer and reading the scriptures, listening to a podcast on the way to work or in morning exercise or just giving yourself a bit of space.

**Thirdly, Listening for God is not easy. Samuel needed Eli’s help** to realize that God was speaking to him and to get ready to listen. (Nathanael needed Philip’s urging before he paid any attention to Jesus.) I guess we can all identify people who have taught us how to recognize God’s voice – teachers, special friends or relatives, even children.

The older generation often needs younger ones to show us how to use our electronic gadgets and computers. In a similar way the younger generation often calls on the experience of older people when they have their own problems and are unsure about how to deal with them. WE all remember the time before Google!

Mum, dad, granny, granddad, aunty, uncle often come into their own as they pass on things they have learned. We need each other to help us live lives to the full. Even when people have died and passed on, their influence still lives on, for better or for ill – to be honest. We need God’s wisdom to work through that.

Eli sadly was a man who couldn’t control and inspire his own sons. They had grown up to be corrupt and not worthy of becoming leaders in their country. Yet Eli was to have a profound and good influence on young Samuel.

**Listening to God is not easy**.

Prayer is communication: calling and responding to God. Prayer is an openness to encounter more of God, but also to understand more of yourself in the process - to look at your own life direction and attitudes:

*‘How can you expect to be heard by God, when you do not hear yourself’ (Cyprian).*

Prayer is also about the world - difficult situations, problems etc. and finding the way forward with God.

Back when the telegraph was the fastest method of long-distance communication, a young man applied for a job as a Morse code operator. Answering an ad in the newspaper he went to the office address and found a large busy office filled with noise and clatter, including the sound of the telegraph in the background. A sign on the receptionist desk instructed the job applicants to fill out a form and wait until they were summoned to enter the inner office.

The young man filled out his form and sat down with the seven other applicants in the waiting room.

After a few minutes the young man stood up crossed the room to the door of the inner office and walked right in. Naturally the other applicants perked up, wondering what was going on. The muttered among themselves that they hadn’t heard any summons yet. They assumed that the young man who went out made a mistake and would be disqualified.

Within a few minutes however the employer escorted the young man out of the office and said to the other applicants ‘ thank you very much for coming but the job has just been filled.

The other applicants began grumbling to each other and one spoke up and said ‘what’s going on? He was the last to come in and we never got a chance to be interviewed. Yet he got the job. That’s not fair’.

The employer said ‘I’m sorry, but all the time you’ve been sitting here the telegraph has been ticking out the message in Morse code: ‘If you understand this message, then come right in the job is yours.’ None of you heard it or understood it. This young man did. The job is his.’

We live in a world that is full of busyness and clatter, like that office. People distracted and unable to hear the still small voice of God. Are we tuned in to God’s voice?

**Fourthly, Can we identify ways that God speaks*.*** In this story God speaks through a voice that Samuel can hear with his ears. But God speaks in other ways too. Sometimes we read something in the Bible and know it is meant for us. Sometimes when we are scared or sad, we feel God very close to us helping us be brave. Sometimes when we are outside, we see something God has made and feel God loving us. Sometimes we have a feeling deep inside that God wants us to do something to take care of another person.

I love the description of how God will speak through Samuel and it will ‘make the ears of everyone who hears it tingle!’ verse 11.

Sometimes you feel like your ears are tingling when God is speaking.

 On the Alpha Course Nicky Gumbel writes how he talks about five ways in which God guides us, under the heading of ‘the five CSs’.

*Commanding Scripture*

You read something in the Bible and it speaks to you our guides you.

*Compelling Spirit*

The Holy Spirit leads us as we pray. We get a nudge or a feeling, or a conviction about something.

*Common Sense*

Use your reason and make common sense decisions.

*Counsel of the Saints*

You take advice from friends you can trust who are also praying for you.

*Circumstantial Signs*

Circumstances guide us and God uses everyday stuff and ‘coincidences to guide us *.*

Some of those elements are present in this story. Samuel has a compelling spirit in his heart. He has the counsel of Eli. He has a circumstantial sign in going back to sleep and if he is woken again that God is calling him.

Eli helps him understand God’s call.

**Fifthly, listening for the call of God is the act of vocation.**

A sense of calling to something is called a Vocation and comes from the Latin vocare, to call, and means the work a person is called to by God.

-There are all different kinds of voices calling you to all different kinds of work, and the problem is to find out which is the voice of God rather than of Society, say, or the Superego, or Self-Interest.

-The world lacks any sense of what Scripture describes as “calling,” or what Christians later termed “vocation”—a perspective that God has called and equipped people to serve Him through their work in the world. Instead, our culture encourages us to climb a work/identity ladder that is ultimately self-serving, and often self-destructive.

What is God’s call on our lives? For some it is to a specific career. For some it is a ministry in the church – maybe whilst they do work to pay the bills. For some it is a calling to raise a family. Different callings. But we believe we are the priesthood of all believers. God calls all of us to different roles and responsibilities.

Have we discovered our gifts and strengths? Are we using them? What might God be calling us to do with these gifts? Has the church community recognized and encouraged those gifts –sometimes we are distracted and can’t see what is under our nose.

*-Neither the hair shirt nor the soft berth will do. The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet*. Frederick Buchner. –

*One doesn't fulfill his vocation just by doing the things God sent him to do but also by letting things be done to him that God allows to be done to him*...Henri Nouwen

A poem written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in prison, as he waited to be executed by the Nazis ends when he writes, *"'Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine. Whoever I am, thou knowest, O [God], I am thine.*'"

While we immerse ourselves in identity politics and divide our communities by labels, setting one group against another, especially at this General Election time (could be worse – we could be in America! Where most people have guns!), we are reassured that we belong to God and that we are intimately and steadfastly loved. We are "not mass-produced but custom-made,"

There is a story about "young Rabbi Zusya, who was quite discouraged about his failures and weaknesses. Said an older rabbi to him, 'When you get to heaven, God is not going to say to you, "Why weren't you Moses?"

No, God will say, "Why weren't you Zusya?" So why don't you stop trying to be Moses, and start being the Zusya God created you to be?'"

And this profound sense of our identity and our belonging to God, of God's ongoing creation of us, of our being called and then called again, each one of us with our unique gifts and life story.

God’s call to Samuel initially involved him bringing a tough message to Eli. God was going to replace him and his sons from their priestly office. Samuel had to announce their notice. Eli to his credit understands the message and concedes power gracefully. He hands over to the younger generation.

Eli represents the vested interests who are used to having their way, and had lost the plot, grown corrupt, were far from the heart of God, of seeking their own ends, rather than seeking the interests of God or the people whom they serve.

By contrast, Samuel represents those to whom no one ever listens, the people who are regularly dismissed as unimportant, peripheral, or out of touch with “the real world.” It is such people, the text shouts, in whom the Lord delights in using as conduits for bringing the Word to the people.

Like so many other biblical narratives, we identify with the underdog, Samuel, yet the sad truth is that we are always in danger of ending up like doddering Eli, having lost sight of what our mission is, and unable to hear anything that might correct us.

God continually raises up unlikely vessels to be the bearer of his word.

Eli overcame his prejudices – he could’ve dismissed what Samuel had to say as the voice of youth.

There are all sorts of tensions in this world between different peoples and different ages. There can be a prejudice against age – you’re too old, or you’re too young.. We all know too well of the prejudice that many have against people of faith.

**But finally, friends can help people get past their prejudices to hear God.** Eli’s friendship with Samuel obviously enabled him to listen to what God was saying through this young boy.

May we listen out for God’s call on our lives even from the most unlikely sources. Is that you Lord? Here I am.

**Prayers of intercession**

**Being open to God**

As we come to God, let us sit in stillness and silence, listening for his still, small voice…

*(pause for silence)*

*The response in these prayers requires some action on our part this week. Not just to pray the words but to listen for what God might be saying to us, or asking of us, in each situation that we are praying for. Let us, like Samuel, be ready to act when God speaks.*

Leader: O Lord, when you call, let us answer:
**All: Speak, Lord, we are listening.**

Lord, we lift our world up to you. We look at all the places of war and unrest: Ukraine, Israel, Gaza, Myanmar and many parts of Africa. There is so much anger, hatred and distrust. Lord, it grieves your heart of love, and we lament with you for a world in pain. We pray for those who are the victims of the violence as well as those who bring it about. Lord, speak your words of peace into the nations. Bring a ceasefire to all hostilities, we pray. Lord, show us how to pray for your world. Show us how to be peacemakers and bringers of restoration in places of conflict.

Leader: O Lord, when you call, let us answer:
**All: Speak, Lord, we are listening.**

As so many countries of the world will have elections this year, we pray for the leaders of the nations, that you will raise up women and men of integrity and peace. We pray for those who serve their country in whatever capacity; may they be people who seek to put the needs of others before themselves. We pray for Christian politicians, that they will not be torn between their faith and their job. Give them courage to speak and act for you and to be an influence for good. We also pray for ourselves, that you will show us how and where we can be influencers for you, Lord. We think of where you have placed us: in our families, our homes and streets, our work or school, our leisure. Help us to bring your wholeness into every situation this week and always.

Leader: O Lord, when you call, let us answer:
**All: Speak, Lord, we are listening.**

We pray for our church community. We bring before you any pressing needs or concerns….

We pray for the work of this church during the week ahead. Show us where we can be your hands, eyes, ears and voice in our local area. Lord, is there someone or somewhere you particularly want us to go to this week? We pause in silence to listen again for your still, small voice….

Help us to take our love for you out into our streets, shops, schools and businesses this week. We pray that our community will be flooded with your love and glory.

Leader: O Lord, when you call, let us answer:
**All: Speak, Lord, we are listening.**

We pray for the young people of our community, particularly those taking exams at the moment. Lord, may there be an air of calm and peace in their hearts and in the exam rooms. Help the revision to go well and the students to do their best. Give wisdom, also, to those who are marking the exam papers. Help parents, teachers and friends to speak words of encouragement and support and may all our young people be safe in the knowledge that they are loved and valued by you no matter what the outcome of their exams.

Leader: O Lord, when you call, let us answer:
**All: Speak, Lord, we are listening.**

We pray for those we know who are struggling at the moment: for those who are sick (particularly…); for those who suffer from depression or anxiety (particularly…); for the elderly and bewildered; for those who are sad and sorrowful, especially because someone they love has died (particularly the families and friends of…). Lord, help us not to pass by on the other side when we see someone in need or in pain. Help us to be good listeners to one another and to give up our time just to sit with those who need our support.

Leader: O Lord, when you call, let us answer:
**All: Speak, Lord, we are listening.**

Finally, Lord, we offer the coming week to you. In the stillness, we picture the places where we are expecting to be and the people we are expecting to be with. Go before us to prepare our way. Smooth the path where there might be friction and ease the path where there might be pain.

Help us to be ready for any eventualities that may take up more time or effort than we might have hoped. Help us to see your presence in every situation and to follow where you lead.

Leader: O Lord, when you call, let us answer:
**All: Speak, Lord, we are listening.**

**Go before us and guide us and help us to follow. Amen.**

**A prayer for all ages together**

Lord, help us to look for you. *(look from side to side)*
May we listen for you *(cup ears with hands)*
in the silence, *(stand still)*
or in the noise, *(stamp feet noisily)*
at all times, *(hands of a clock)*
and in all places. *(sweeping motion)*
May we wait and listen for you.
**Amen.**

**A sending out prayer**

So now we go out with confidence in you,
our loving God who leads us;
you know our weaknesses and our strengths.
**Lord, call us, guide us,**
**and strengthen us in your service.**
**Amen.**

**A sending out prayer**

Go in the name of the Lord
to your homes, your neighbours, your communities.
Go and make a difference.
Raise up those who are disheartened.
Tell others about the risen Christ.
Visit those who are lonely,
and may your heart and mind be open
to receive all that God gives to you and asks of you.
**Amen.**

God reaches out to us in so many ways,
in beauty around us and silence within,
stirring us to action or helping us wait.
Let us reach out to God now
and give ourselves space to see, feel and hear the call.

1. Rev Stuart Wild, <https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2024/131-may-june-2024-b/proper-4/the-week-in-focus> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)