

We are in a sermon series called, “Ordinary People: Extraordinary Calling.” Last week, we talked about Abraham & Sarah’s calling, and learned that we are never too old to be called to do God’s extraordinary work. We simply “Go, and trust that God will show us along the way.” Today, we learn from the biblical character, Samuel, that we’re never too young to be called either.

The scripture we just heard tells the story of young Samuel, a regular kid who is just trying to get a good night’s sleep. In the quiet of the night, when he is most vulnerable, he hears this nagging voice calling his name; it just won’t leave him alone. He tries to answer, but he just doesn’t know how to respond just yet. He isn’t really sure what’s going on. So, how did Samuel get to this sacred place?

Well, Samuel’s mother, Hannah, wanted Samuel for a very long time, and when she finally gave birth to Samuel, she dedicated him to the Lord’s service. As a young boy, he goes to live at the temple to serve as an assistant to Eli, the High Priest. He wasn’t abandoned; Samuel’s parents visited him and made him new robes to wear. Hannah was just so grateful for God answering her prayer to have a child, that she gave him to God as an offering of thanksgiving.

Samuel’s job at the temple was to assist Eli in any tasks, especially since Eli was aging and his eyesight failing. He probably did lots of odd jobs, but his primary job was to keep the lamp of God burning and to open the doors to the temple in the morning. So, it makes sense that he slept in the temple.

And so, as scripture tells us, God calls him one night while “on duty,” but he doesn’t recognize God’s voice. This is the first time this has happened, so he isn’t sure whose voice it is. He thought Eli was calling him, since Eli probably did call for him when he needed help with various jobs. He was attuned to Eli’s calling him, so he assumes it’s Eli.

However, Eli is attuned to God’s voice, and he recognizes that Samuel is being called. He advised Samuel on how to respond the next time God calls. Even though Samuel was so near to God’s presence in the temple, he doesn’t recognize God’s call. Isn’t that true today? We can attend church all our lives, read the Bible, serve on committees – because you know committee work is the Lord’s work! – and we still don’t recognize God’s calling on our lives.

Samuel had a church job, but it wasn’t his calling. God had bigger plans for Samuel. Samuel would eventually become a prophet, God’s mouthpiece, for a nation in transition. But, first, he had some growing to do, literally. He was probably eleven years old. God began calling Samuel as a young boy perhaps because he would be open to God shaping his life, and perhaps because it would take a lifetime for Samuel to grow into whom God was calling him to be. A prophet during this time was not going to be easy.

The first prophesy Samuel received was not easy to process either. He learned that his priest’s family would be destroyed. The very man who told him to go back and listen for God’s instructions. Verse fifteen tells us that Samuel laid there until morning.

I'm sure he was wide-eyed, staring at the ceiling, trying to figure this out.

“Was this God’s voice? Or was this just my imagination? Was this a dream?” We have to admit that this is pretty heavy for a kid, but no matter what age, we all play this guessing game as we’re processing what we just heard – or what we thought we heard. I myself have stared at my bedroom ceiling many a night trying to process.

Samuel was afraid to tell Eli, his father figure, the vision. He didn’t want to be the bearer of bad news. Perhaps if he said it out loud, then it would come true. So, he went about his day, performing his duties, as if nothing happened. Pretending like it was just an ordinary day. But Eli holds him accountable. He knew he had been called, so in his role as priest, he challenges him to face his calling. He can’t ignore it, no matter how difficult it may be.

We’re all afraid when we’re called. Because when we’re being beckoned into the unknown, into the mystery. It’s hard to process. We don’t like mystery. We are logical beings and want logical answers, firm plans, spreadsheets and proposals. God doesn’t call us to firm plans and proposals. God calls us to say “Here I Am, Lord, I’m listening.”

We may be a young person or young in our faith, or we may be in “advanced age.” We are never too young nor too old to be called by God. God calls us all to do God’s extraordinary work. We’re all afraid because it’s taking a step into the unknown, and we know our lives will never be the same. But, if we don’t listen or answer when God calls, we miss out on the beautiful life that God has created just for us. It will be confusing in the beginning to

figure out if it’s God’s voice or our imagination or the many other voices vying for our attention. Go to someone who is accustomed to perceiving the divine’s call. Find an Eli who can help navigate this journey.

God has something bigger in store for all of us. We may not be able to perceive it now or recognize that it’s God’s voice, but God is calling us, ordinary people to do God’s extraordinary work. God isn’t finished with us yet. May we wait near the presence of God and when God calls, answer, “Here I am, Lord, your servant is listening.” Amen.