

Here I Am; Send Me!
1 Samuel 3:1-10
Wilton Presbyterian Church
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Have you ever been awakened at night and been frustrated, wondering why? Maybe you've tossed and turned, looking at the clock, thinking... I really need to be asleep.

I have. But, more often than not, I've thought when I have awakened at night, that God is trying to use that time, uninterrupted, as a way to get my attention. So, rather than toss and turn, quite often, I will ask... in a prayerful attitude... "What's up?" I can't say I've ever had a verbal response, only a deep feeling that God is present and quite often I end up with a simple prayer of "Thank you." Maybe that was the whole point anyway.

Young Samuel heard the voice of God in the middle of the night. It was such a familiar voice that he thought he was being summoned by his long-time mentor, Eli, the high priest. Samuel went into Eli and asked what he wanted...And it was a bit before Eli realized that it was God calling his young mentee before he told him to listen again. All through this sweet story, the willing Samuel responded, "Here I am!" Such a willingness to respond to what was needed.

Samuel was the young boy, born to Hannah and Elkanah. You remember the story of Hannah who had gone to the temple when she could not get pregnant and had prayed earnestly for a child. As difficult as it might have been, she prayed that if God gave her a child, she would dedicate him back to God's service. Samuel was the answer to her prayers. After his birth, faithful Hannah followed through and did indeed take him to the

temple where she dedicated his life to God in a prayer reminiscent of Mary's Magnificat upon hearing of the impending birth of Jesus. Young Samuel was raised at the temple under Eli's wing.

So, this exchange was tender and opened a pathway to Samuel's call into the ministry as God's next prophet.

For those of us in positions of power, how do we amplify the voices around us of those who need to be heard? And for those of us who are called to say our truth, how do we do that with integrity, even at the risk of not being heard?

For those who dare to step out to express their voices...it's a brave thing. It's vulnerable; it's risky, too, because it takes us out of our comfort zone.

Here I am, send me... to tell my truth, to walk in my truth, to be a voice for others.

Here I am... send me to do the work to which I am called.

This may seem like a sweet and earnest text, about responding to a call. But if we look at the text in context... if we continue to read the text, we see it's much more complicated than at first glance. This text which follows explains that Samuel would be called to respond to Eli's sons' abuse of power. In verses 11-20, the message of God's judgment is conveyed on the house of Eli, announcing that change of leadership is afoot because of the abuse of priestly power by Eli's sons.

Accountability for those in power... it's been a necessity since the beginning of time. The biblical narrative is full of stories of unsuspecting followers who are called to speak truth to power. It was a primary focus of Jesus' ministry.

And believe me, it's not an easy or comfortable topic, especially in this time of our nation's history... but this is the text for this day... and it is more applicable than not right now in our lives.

Next week, I will have celebrated 30 years as an ordained minister of word and sacrament. Early on... in my first call, I was asked to serve on a commission in the presbytery to investigate claims of sexual misconduct against a seasoned clergyperson who had mentored many of the "big steeple pastors" in the presbytery. I won't go into the details here, but let's say that this man, who had left the denomination by that time to join another (so as to escape scrutiny) was accused of criminal activities over a long period of time.

By the time it all came to the surface, it was decades later. The woman who had been the victim of his actions had since grown up and had undergone years of therapy, earned a doctorate, and was teaching in a university in the Midwest. She returned to the Hudson Valley to tell her story, and as a result, teach the presbytery as a whole about the impact and extreme devastation which occurs when a person in power abuses the trust bestowed upon them.

She was calling not only him into account, but those who had been blind to his actions over a period of years. His friends and mentees hadn't wanted to see it. This man's manipulation and charisma had blinded many, who had loved and revered him, to the devastating truth behind his actions.

This brave woman... said... here am I send me... not knowing what would befall her... but knowing that God would somehow use her truth-telling to bring account to the person who had abused power and who had previously been deemed untouchable.

As a result of her faithfulness, the whole presbytery system awakened and repented. It developed new ways to see the truth of those who would abuse their power in hurtful ways and implemented safeguards accountability standards to ensure it wouldn't happen in the same way again.

Thank God for her... for her willingness to say, here I am... send me... regardless of the cost to her.

Martin Luther King Jr, whose birthday we honor this weekend, also responded with here I am... send me... to the call to speak truth to power for the sake of bringing integrity and justice to all. Even in the midst of great backlash, the Baptist Minister who is the face of the modern-day Civil Rights movement used his power for good, saying:

“Hate begets hate; violence begets violence; toughness begets a greater toughness. We must meet the forces of hate with the power of love.”

The reality is... people of differing viewpoints will hear the call to speak the truth to power. We are witnessing that right now in response to our national election. So, what does this text and the tenets of our faith tell us? Jesus always spoke truth to power, **but he did it without violence and he did it with humility.** Jesus never used power OVER others... to usurp control, but rather, he called people to follow him by making a choice. Martin Luther King Jr. led the movement which would have a lasting impact based on love and non-violence, following the path of Jesus.

And so it was with Samuel, whose story of willingness to respond to God's call to be a voice of truth and integrity which lasted throughout his lifetime... as a judge and a prophet in Israel's history, leaves us with several things upon which to reflect:

Thank goodness for parents in our lives who see more for us than we can for ourselves and open the way for us to respond to the calls in our lives. Thank goodness for the mentors in our lives who are strong enough to get out of the way and make room for those coming up in their tutelage to shine and even take their place when the time is right. And for those of us in positions of power, may we use it wisely and compassionately. There will~~ more often than not~~ be a time of reckoning at some point if we abuse the power we have been given... so how are we using our power of influence to further God's realm of love, light and justice in our world?

May God grant us the wisdom and the humility to follow, saying, here I am... send me.

Amen!