

1 Samuel 15:34–16:13; Mark 4:26-34

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

We're in the season after Pentecost so here on Saturday nights we're going to be doing what is called the semi-continuous reading for the first lesson. That's an option we can do, if you remember that in the Lutheran Church we're on a three-year scriptural cycle and during the season of Pentecost, which is our longest season, the first lesson can be what is called a semi-continuous reading. So, for the next several weeks we're going to be hearing various stories out of the book of first and second Samuel.

But I need to catch us up a little bit because our first reading tonight starts in the 15th chapter and there's a whole lot of stuff that happened in chapters one through fifteen, we need to do a little bit of catching up.

First of all who is this guy Samuel? Well way back in chapter one, we find out that there was this woman named Hannah who was married to a guy named Elhanan, you don't need to worry about all these names. But Hannah loved her husband, but she wanted a child. She was childless and so every year when they would go to the tabernacle, this is before the temple is built, so the tabernacle is that big tent that they carried around with them forty years in the wilderness before they got to the promised land, same tabernacle. They would go to the tabernacle to pray and make sacrifices. This one year Hannah goes and she is just so into praying, as a matter of fact, she is so into praying that the priest there at the temple, a guy named Eli, sees her and he thinks she is drunk because she is just so into the praying. And he yells at her and she says no, no, no, I am not drunk; I am really just, I just really want a child. I love the Lord and if I have a child, especially if I have a boy, I will dedicate the son to the Lord. And Eli says, oh, I am sorry. May your wish become the Lord's blessing. And so Hannah leaves, and I love the by-looker that says that she went and had relations with her husband. Which means. . . well you know what it means.

So, she conceives and she has a boy and she names him Samuel and she is very excited and she tells her husband that this child is going to be dedicated to the Lord. And so once little Samuel is weaned, somewhere between the age of three and five, she returns to the temple and explains to Eli. Eli, remember me I was that woman that you thought was drunk, but I wanted a child and now God has blessed me with a child and I promised God that I would dedicate this child to the Lord. So I am giving my son Samuel, I am giving my son to God for you to take care of. And so Samuel grows up there in the tabernacle with Eli. Now you might remember the better known story from chapter three where one night Samuel is asleep and Eli is sleeping in another room and Samuel hears somebody call him so he gets up and goes running and says, okay Eli, what do you need Eli says, I didn't call you, go back to sleep and so Samuel goes back to bed and again he hears this voice and he jumps up and he goes, Eli, I am here, what did you want, I am not calling you Samuel. Oh, wait a minute Samuel, you know what? I bet that is the Lord calling you. So what I want you to do Samuel is the next time you hear this voice say, "Speak Lord,

your servant is listening.” So sure enough Samuel goes back to bed, he lays down, we don’t know exactly how old Samuel is we’re figuring he is probably somewhere around ten at this point. And he hear the voice call his name one more time and so he stands up and he says, “Speak Lord, your servant is listening.”

From a very young age, Samuel is a follower of the Lord God Almighty. He does what the Lord asks him to, what the Lord tells him to. Now a few chapters later, and Samuel has grown up and he has become a leader within the nation of Israel and the people come to him and they start to complain and whine. We want a king; we want to be like all the other countries around us. Everyone else has a king, let us have a king. And Samuel says, you don’t want a king, because a king is going to tax you, a king’s going to draft you, a king’s going to make you work. No, no, we want a king. And so Samuel prays to God and God says don’t worry Samuel, it is Not against you, it’s AGAINST me go and give them a king, but you’ve got to remind them once again of all those things. Long story short is that, I was at synod assembly yesterday and today, it’s been a really long two days. That they get a king. They get this wonderful guy, this good looking guy, his name is Saul. They get Saul and Saul for a while is a really good king. He goes and he defeats the Philistines, the enemies of the Israelites and he leads the people and starts to rally them together. He starts to combine this loose conglomeration of people who have been living there in the chosen land for so many years. He starts to bring them together. But Saul, like so many of us, messes up. Saul messed up not against the people of Israel, but against God. God told Saul to do something, but Saul said no, I have a better idea, and God said that’s it buddy, that’s a Brock paraphrase, your decedents are not going to follow you onto the throne. And so God tells Samuel I want you to go and anoint another king.

We have a little bit of a problem with anointing just as it is not something that happens here in the 21st century North America very often. It probably happens to most of us though when we were baptized. When we’re baptized after we have the water poured over our heads, in our Lutheran tradition, the pastor will take an oil sock, it is a little container of oil, he puts his or her thumb into that oil and then makes the sign of the cross on the forehead. It’s a reminder then that we are now marked, we are chosen by God and marked with the Cross of Christ so that God knows us where ever we are. It’s not going to be seen by other people, but we have that mark of the cross upon our forehead. That comes from that whole process of anointing, choosing, making someone special. That is what the anointment is all about. And so God tells Samuel, I want you to go and fill this ram’s horn with oil, go and find this person that I am going to tell you to. I want you to go Bethlehem, to the tent of Jesse; you’ll know him once you see him. I want you to go and I will tell you which of Jesse’s sons I want you to anoint. So Samuel goes to the tent, he finds Jesse and he sees the oldest boy, and by the way you did a great job on all those names, thank you. He finds the oldest boy and he thinks surely, surely, this man is the one who God wants because he is tall, he is good looking, he’s muscular. But no, God doesn’t want the oldest son. Cause God always wants the first son, isn’t that right, the first born, that’s suppose to be the special one. God says no, not the first son. Well here comes the second son who is as equally good looking and handsome and strong and talented as the older son, but God says no. And Samuel says, Lord, come on now, what are you talking about here, look at these capable people, they’re good looking, they’re talented, they’re strong, they’ve got to be one of the leaders and God says, will you trust me Samuel? The third son comes in, the fourth son comes in, the fifth son comes in, the sixth son comes in, the seventh son comes in, and Samuel by this point is

scratching his head, but he says no, God keeps saying no. Jesse don't you have anybody else here? And Jesse says, well my youngest boy is outside tending the sheep, but you don't want him, he's too young, he's just a kid. Samuel says, bring him in, because by this time Samuel has started to understand that **his** idea of what God wants is not necessarily the same thing as what God wants. And in comes David, young, as good looking as his brothers, not as tall, not as muscular, because he is not full grown as yet, and God says **this one**. You have to trust me Samuel, God is saying. I know what I am doing.

Maybe you've been in a situation like that. Maybe there have been times in your life what you thought you knew what it was that God was going to do and you have been so convinced and so convicted of that that when that doesn't happen, excuse me God, did you forget what you were supposed to be doing right here. Do you remember that thing that I said you were going to do, do you remember that thing? God doesn't always work in the ways that we want God to. And then we need to ask, well God, why didn't that happen? I think it comes down to faith. The faith that Samuel had in what he was going and his faith in God. How big really was Samuel's faith? I think it's interesting that we get our gospel reading with this tonight where Jesus is talking about faith the size of a mustard seed. Those parables that Jesus told tonight that we heard as Adrian read them to us. Those are really dangerous parables. Those parables are rather like telling Samuel to go and anoint a new king when the current king is still seated and has no desire whatever to step down and allow somebody else to take over. These parables of Jesus are calling really for some radical thing in our lives. With just a little bit of faith, Jesus says, you can accomplish amazing things. So if we can do that with just a little bit of faith, what can we do with faith the size of a peanut, or an acorn, or a grapefruit, or let's really take the analogy and say a watermelon? What can your faith do if it is that big? Or perhaps put another way, what can God do with you, what can God do with me, if I stop REJECTING God and allow God to work THRU me. And by allowing God to work through me, I begin to trust in those promises that were made for me in my baptism, those promises that I took on for myself at my affirmation of baptism. Those promises that bring us into a RELATIONSHIP with God. A relationship that will open our eyes to what God wants us to see, not the things that WE want, or the things that "I" want to see, but the relationship that opens our eye to what God wants us to see.

I suppose we could say in some respects our relationship with God is kind of like a good marriage, since the two of you are celebrating your tenth anniversary, congratulations. But the thing about marriage, and I might get some of you upset with me, but I don't think a marriage is about love, because love can come and go and love is different for just about everybody. When I got my latest little hand held computer, I was telling how much I really loved it, but then last week I was in a Verizon store getting Marianne's phone fixed and I saw all these NEW little electronic gadgets that can do all these wonderful and amazing things and now I don't love my little handheld computer anymore, I am in love with something else. A marriage I think, a marriage is about friendship and trust and faith. Our relationship with God is about friendship and trust and faith. Like what Jesus is talking about with a mustard seed, just like what Samuel is missing by NOT trusting God.

I think there are at least three things that we can get out of our lessons tonight. Just like Samuel, first of all we need to **look for God in unlikely places**. Samuel didn't think he would find God there in Jesse's tent to begin with, and then he was rather certain God would be working in one

of those older sons. God doesn't work in ways that we always understand. Next I think we we're called to *develop a more intentional process of defining our biases*, because Samuel was biased. He was judging those sons of Jesse on their looks, on their appearance, on their size, and on their beauty. Now many times do we judge on looks alone or choose a thing that is pretty rather than the one that is practical. I find it interesting that the web-based dating serving e-Harmony recognizes this. E-Harmony doesn't allow applicants to view each other's photos until after they have gone through several series of questionnaires about one another, to find out how compatible they are before they can see each other. Finally too, I think that we need to think about *who God is calling us to give a second chance to*. Who is God calling us to anoint in our own lives, to make special. Maybe it's a co-worker we judged too harshly; maybe it's a relative who said some unkind words. Maybe it's that individual who cut you off in traffic for three mornings in a row. Maybe it's the kid at church who is just an active kid and really **CAN NOT** sit still, he's not bad, he just can't sit still.

I think our lessons tonight calls us to NOT be blinded by our own preconceptions because we miss so much when we have already decided what we're going to see. We're called to spread those seeds of faith because we never know where those seeds will fall nor how they will sprout. We are called, like Samuel; so let us respond like that young boy Samuel, before he thought he knew what God wanted, let us respond each day, Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.

Amen.