

Sermon on 1 Samuel 3:1-10 for St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church
Epiphany 3 - 1.21.18 – Nate Scharf

Big Little Boy. Perfect Patient God.

The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions. ² One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. ³ The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the LORD, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." ⁵ And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down. ⁶ Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

⁸ A third time the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and 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 and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

It's time to change the light bulb. I have to confess to you that it has been almost a year since my garage door opener light went out. Try to withhold judgment. I initially got a ladder out and tried a couple different light bulbs, but they weren't the right size, so I gave up. So I have been pulling into a dark garage many a night for a year. And the occasional moonlight is not bright enough to identify the misplaced bike, toy car or the ice that has formed from the melting tire slush. I guess I've just gotten used to the darkness, but my shins and items I'm carrying often pay for it. God's people had gotten used to the darkness. A burnt out lightbulb wasn't the problem. Their hearts were dark with idolatry and sin. Faith in the true God grew very dim or was out. They had rejected their God so many times that finally it seemed God was silent. But our **Perfect Patient God** was saving his breath to break through silence and darkness that consumed their hearts with the light of his Word, starting with a simple call to a **Big Little Boy**.

What a blessing Samuel, this **Big Little Boy** was to Eli the priest, who was old and almost blind. This miracle baby of Hannah and Elkanah had grown into a fine young boy at a time when godly youth were rare. Eli's own sons, who served as priests, were unbelievers and were more trouble than help to Eli. But Samuel

served the Lord in all his duties at the temple and by being an aid to the aged priest Eli. *“The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions. One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the LORD, where the ark of God was.”*

Spiritual darkness was all around Israel, and physical darkness soon to set in on Samuel, this **Big Little Boy**. Enter our **Perfect Patient God**, *“The LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, ‘Here I am.’ And he ran to Eli and said, ‘Here I am; you called me.’ But Eli said, ‘I did not call; go back and lie down.’ So he went and lay down. Again the LORD called, ‘Samuel!’ And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, ‘Here I am; you called me.’ ‘My son,’ Eli said, ‘I did not call; go back and lie down.’ God broke his silence with a simple call of a name, ‘Samuel.’ And Samuel thought it was Eli calling him. Dutifully and without grumbling he got up and ran to see what Eli might need. Why should he think anyone else would call? Eli was the only logical explanation. God would call to Samuel a total of four times.*

God is patient, isn't he? He calls to Samuel again and again. He's patient, isn't he, that he even utters another word to anyone in Israel with all the corruption and idolatry. God had given them the Promised Land and rest from their enemies. But they too quickly took it all and God himself for granted and soon forgot him. They deserved to be left in the darkness and in the silence of their sin. But God once again patiently speaks to his rebellious people. Again and again he calls this **Big Little Boy** by name.

This was a real boy, a real priest, a real people and we still have a real God. As we look at our history, and we learn from their examples, does it worry you that maybe we give God reasons to leave us in darkness? You know I am sincere here at church and I know you are too, but it amazes me how quickly I can take God's truth to heart while here among God's people in the refuge of God's house, and yet struggle to take that truth out the door with me and consistently apply God's comforts and commands in my words and actions at work, at play, in my own home and in my own head.

And the devil, the world and my sinful nature quickly offer the same deceptions and damnable offers – just taste test sin - a little greed, a little lust, a little apathy or laziness, doubt, pride, anger, or despair. Take time for you, your kids, activities, leaving little or no time in God's Word. Savor sin. Go through the emotions – the thrill, followed by regret, guilt and shame, and the darkness sets in, and the only answer the devil offers is to sin more to get you out of this unhappy hole, digging even deeper. Now don't just taste it, tolerate it with yourself or with others. Finally, let the darkness take over – the sin must stay, the

damage is done; there is no use fighting it. We don't even bother to think of changing the light bulb anymore. It's just dark and that's how it is. Deep down maybe we deserve it.

But our Perfect Patient God speaks. He speaks my name, "Nate." He speaks your name, "_____." At first you don't know who's calling or if it could really be for you – "not me, I don't deserve it." But God calls. He first called your name at your baptism as he put his name on you – Father, Son and Holy Spirit and marked you as his child. He called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. He washed you clean of your sin and clothed you with Jesus' righteousness (Gal.3:27). Though the devil has given you plenty of sin to taste which only embitters and hurts, Jesus gives you his own body and blood together with the bread and the wine to show you what forgiveness, life and freedom taste like, a supper which lights you up spiritually and satisfies your heart. He gives you his Word, the good news of the Bible, of Christ crucified for your sins and risen for your justification. You are declared not guilty and given a whole lot of promises:

*"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget I will not forget you! See I have engraved you on the palms of my hands" (Is.49). "My sheep listen to my voice, I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish, no one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10). I have buried your sins in the depths of the sea (Mic 7), As far as the east is from the west so far has he removed our transgressions from us (Psalm 103). Father, forgive them (Luke 23), You will be with me in paradise (Luke 23), My father's house has many rooms (John 14), In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world (John 16). Through his wounds we are healed (Is 53). There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8). Because I live, you also will live (John 14). Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me (Matt 16). Behold I am coming soon. My reward is with me (Rev.22). I will come back and take you to be with me, so that you also may be where I am. (John 14). Our **Perfect Patient God** breaks the silence to call time and time again to you with his forgiveness, his promises and his guidance and plan for your life. Realize God has called to you with his Word and Sacraments.*

"Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling to the boy. So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The LORD came and stood there, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." This theme "Speak for your servant is listening," characterized Samuel's whole life. He followed God's way and word when others loved him for it, and when they persecuted him for it. But Samuel was bound by

the one who broke the silence that sin had worked and had liberated him from the devil's power and delivered him from death. And he didn't hesitate, because God knew him, loved him, and had work for him to do.

You have the same God, the same God-given faith as this **Big Little Boy**. You have the same God who calls you by name to be his own. While you are not a prophet in the same way Samuel was, you are a witness to those around you. God has equipped you to put His words into practice to combat the devil's taste test temptations, to quit tolerating sin in your own life and to speak the truth in love to your own heart and to others. Remind yourself and them of God's law and also of God's forgiveness and the power He gives to walk in his commands as freed and forgiven children of God. You are God's servant, Let him speak, and you listen. "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." It is time to change the lightbulb and to walk in the light of our **Perfect Patient God**. Amen.

Children's Message:

How long does it take you to grow? I came to St. Paul's 2 years ago and some of you weren't even here yet. Some of you have grown a foot. Some who were up here are too old to come up for children's messages, but they still listen. How does God grow you? Super quickly? So fast like you take some super grow pills and you grow up? No, not usually. But he does this slowly so we get used to this and coordinate our muscles and our minds. So also God grows us through his Word at different speeds throughout our lives. That's why we can never say we don't need his Word or church anymore. That's why we say we need God's Word every day of our lives. You look out there and you see people of all ages. Some of them are really old, like grandpa and grandma age. 😊. But they are here because God is growing them and helping them understand his love and forgiveness for them and his work with them and in this world. And he does the same for you. God is patient with us. He loves us and sent his son to die on a cross so we are forgiven. He wants to grow us through his Word that you hear at church, when you have devotions at home, when you go to Sunday School – anytime you hear God's Word. Let's thank God for his patience, his love and for growing us. Amen.