

“God Knows”

When reading the three lessons and the psalm appointed for this Sunday I was excited by each one. I found it hard to choose between them and wondered what to do. So I reached back into my Southern Baptist upbringing and decided I would preach on all of the passages. So sit back and relax because we are going to be here for a couple of hours. **[Pause]** Only kidding.

Although I am not kidding about the inspiration I feel reading each of these passages. What really grabs me are the passages from the First Book of Samuel and Psalm 139. Each time I read these two I get electrified. Both of them set off something in me that gives me goosebumps. I imagine it is the proximity that I feel to God as I read each passage that sends a charge of energy flooding through me.

The first passage is about young Samuel in the Tabernacle. You may recall that early in the First Book of Samuel his mother Hannah was the center of the story. She was the wife of Elkanah. Sadly, Hannah was barren, that is unable to have children. Elkanah loved Hannah so much but she was bereft because she could not have children. What's more his other wife Peninnah could have children. We see Hannah in the Tabernacle praying to God for a child. She promises God that if she is able to bear a son she will dedicate him to the service of God. The priest Eli sees her and after talking with her he gives her a blessing. Lo and behold, she becomes pregnant and bears a son.

In today's reading we see young Samuel serving the Lord in the Sanctuary of the Tabernacle. He is there to keep the vigil light burning through the night. He hears a voice call his name three times. Each time he runs to Eli thinking it is he who is calling him. After the third time Eli discerns that it is God who is calling Samuel and tells Samuel how to respond. When God calls again Samuel says, “Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.” What I find so compelling and extraordinary is that God is speaking directly to a boy, and the boy does not realize it is God.

Remember last week how we discussed the importance of preparing for a revelation from God. We need study, meditation, prayer, and worship to prepare our hearts and minds to hear or see God's revelation to us. Clearly, Samuel just being a boy does not have this preparation. The elderly priest Eli does, but even for him it takes three calls to Samuel for Eli to recognize that it is the LORD (YHWH) who is speaking to the boy.

The writer of the book of Samuel says, “The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.” Samuel was probably not aware that God's word could be so very near to him. It took Eli's awareness of the tradition of God speaking to mortals and the amazing signs that the LORD had performed in the ancient of days to open their eyes to this strange call from God.

While it takes us study, meditation, prayer and worship to prepare ourselves for God's revelations to us, God knows us even before we are born. Psalm 139 is a powerful and moving prayer. It opens with the words, “Lord, you have searched me out and known me.” It gives me chills to think that even before I had begun to search out God, God had searched for me and come to know me. Me of all people. You of all people. Each of us God has searched out and knows. God has chosen to know each of us in the most intimate of ways. Our sitting and rising, that is our simple and unremarkable daily activities. God also chooses to know the thoughts of our hearts. Not just our most noble thoughts but also our most vile, violent, hurtful, lustful, and

terrible thoughts. Appreciate the extent to which God has gone to know each of us so intimately. God knows our journeys and resting places, the words on our lips before we even know to speak them. God knows everything about us and as Bishop Goff says still “loves us fiercely.”

The psalmist starts out speaking in the present tense about God’s knowledge of our ways and then proceeds to acknowledge that God’s knowledge goes back to before we were born. He writes, “For you yourself created my inmost parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.” We may blithely acknowledge this, but when we ponder it suddenly it can feel overwhelming. The psalmist knows and reminds us that God’s intimate awareness of each of us goes back to our mother’s womb.

The psalmist says, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me.” If we ponder the implications of this psalm for even just a moment, I assure you that you will feel the same. The theme of this psalm is more than just praise for God. It is a human acknowledgment of the utter dependence on God that all of humanity has from conception to birth through life and unto death. It is truly awe inspiring.

These two readings give chills up and down my spine because of the absolute awesomeness of Samuel’s experience paired with the psalmist who is putting into words the experience of being so fully known. Our being, just our being alive and nothing more should bring us to our knees in wonder, awe and praise. So much of our world has been made to seem mundane, boring, dull, and not at all awesome or mysterious. Yet just the fact that we are here is beyond our understanding. I do not mean the biology of conception and birth, but the mystery of how each one of us is a unique person, a unique personality, a unique soul present in this time and place. We are so used to being here that we hardly stop and think about how spectacular it is that we are alive as the very person that we are.

That is what the psalmist is trying to get us to realize. Samuel’s miraculous birth, of which he may know little, but certainly Eli is aware of, is just one example of that stupendous thing that is life from God. Then that the unrealized person that is the boy Samuel can be visited by God and confided in by God, is possible for each of us, as we discussed last week, when we looked at how revelation is open to each of us regardless of station, spirituality, or power.

For God’s sake and your own allow yourself to be awestruck, amazed, filled with wonder, love and praise. It is there for each of us as it was for Samuel, Eli and the psalmist. Maybe even moreso because we have their examples and writing to help point the way. Allow yourself to be enchanted. Only God knows what wonders you might see.