

Sermon for January 21, 2018
"A World Without Vision"

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Our Bible reading begins with the statement: "The Word of God was rare in those days; visions were not widespread." That seems like an innocent enough statement, but it was serious. The people had no connection with their God. In that day and time, Eli and his sons were the leaders of the people. But Eli's sons were evil. The Bible tells us they were scoundrels who cared nothing for the Lord. Because their leaders were lost, the people of God were lost. They had no guidance or direction in their lives.

Let's get one thing straight, it says, "the word of God was rare," but that is not because God was not talking. God never intends to leave the people of God with no vision to give them direction. The problem was that the people of Samuel's day were not listening for God's word; they were not looking for God's vision. The leaders were corrupt and cared nothing for God. And the people had followed them into worldliness and disregard for God's will.

But one young man was ready to hear. That is why it is so important to note that the Word of God was rare in Samuel's day. Because God was about to bring that Word to them.

We live in the "information age" so maybe we don't appreciate the weight of this problem. Permit me to explain it to you. You see if the people of God have no vision, then they are lost. With no vision from God to give them direction, how are they to know what to do. How can a servant do the master's will, if she or he will not listen to the commands the master is giving?

The people of God with no vision are like a group of blind people trying to lead one another. Jesus talked about the blind leading the blind. I saw that one day! On a street in Columbia I saw a blind man and woman. The woman had her hand on the man's arm and he was leading her. But he had a Seeing Eye dog to lead him.

You see people in general are spiritually blind. People need divine guidance to give them direction. The people of God need God's vision to help them just like that blind couple needed the dog's vision to guide them. If there is no vision from God, the people of God are lost. At best they will not arrive at the destination the master has planned for them. At worst they will fall in a ditch on the way. That is the danger God's people faced when Samuel was a boy ministering in the temple.

Like I said before; it was not God's fault that the Word of God was rare and that the people had no vision. It was the fault of the leaders of the people; mainly the sons of Eli. The Almighty didn't want to leave the people in darkness, so God went about calling a prophet for the people. God decided to find someone who could receive the guidance and the vision that God had for them. Someone who would follow that divine guidance and lead the people.

So there was Samuel. Asleep in the temple. Apparently his job was to attend to the light that burned in the temple. That light was kept burning in the darkness to remind the people of the presence of God in that holy place. In many ways Samuel was performing a task like that done by our acolytes today. Then it happened: God called "Samuel! Samuel!" Now Samuel heard the voice but he did not know it was God who was calling

him. He thought it was Eli. So he went running to Eli. But Eli told Samuel it was not him; to go back to bed. Once again the voice came, "Samuel!" Again Samuel ran to Eli, and Eli once again told him to lie down. A third time it called and Samuel ran to Eli again.

Now this is where the story takes an important turn. Eli realized that it was God who was calling the boy. When God calls a prophet or leader, God does not expect that person to be passive. When God calls, God requires a response. Eli knew this. So he told Samuel to go back to bed. And when the voice came again he should respond. So once again God called Samuel. And this time Samuel responded, "Speak for your servant here." And Samuel became a great prophet and leader of God's people.

This story is appropriate for us today because we today live in an age when the word of God is rare. In the world people are lost. They have no sense of direction. People seek vainly after wealth or power. Or they chase the pleasures of the world. All in an attempt to find something with some meaning or worth. And when they can't, they try to lose themselves in drugs or other indulgences. Without direction people wander into the pitfalls of sin because they are spiritually blind.

I don't think most people realize how serious this is. Without the Word of God, we as humans are incomplete. In Genesis it describes God creating the first human. It says that God formed the human out of the dust of the earth then God breathed life into it. So human beings are basically the dust of the earth made alive by the breath of God.

But God is speaking and some have listened. God has given a vision of where God's people should be going. Last weekend we remember one of those people. Martin Luther King, Jr. had a vision. He had a dream of a world where people are judged by the content of their character and not, the color of their skin. That dream has not been fully realized yet. We have come a long way, but we have not arrived yet.

Where would we be without the guiding vision of Martin Luther or John Wesley or Dietrich Bonhoeffer or Martin Luther King, Jr. or Mother Teresa or others? We would be lost. We would be like the people in Samuel's day. Do you see what I mean?

I personally am particularly drawn to the story of Samuel's calling. When I was a young boy I was an acolyte in Lee Road U.M.C. Like Samuel I had the task of keeping watch over the lights which represented God's presence. From that early time I felt something pulling me to ministry. I didn't know what it was. Like Samuel I did not know it was the voice of God calling me. But there were a number of Eli's who helped me hear God's voice. They were Sunday School Teachers and Choir directors and ministers. They helped me to respond to that calling.

Without a vision of God's will for us, we are lost, but God will not leave us visionless. God is too good to let us grope blindly around in the dark. God is calling people to be prophets and leaders. God is calling young and old people alike. But they need people to help them hear that call.

That task of helping God raise up people to receive the vision and proclaim it to the world is a job for all of us. God is calling all of God's people into ministry. We are here in the temple of God. And the lights are burning, our hearts are aflame! And God calls, "Aldersgate! Aldersgate!" Will we respond, or will we pull the covers over our head and go back to sleep? And God calls, "Aldersgate! Aldersgate!" Join me and together we will say, "Master speak, your servant is listening!"