

CHILD OF PROMISE**Psalm 139: 1-18; 1 Samuel 3:1-10 September 22, 2013****Rev. Sharlyn Gates**

Remember that cell phone company ad – I think it was for Verizon – where the man is holding his phone and walking, often times in some remote place, testing the pick up range for service.

“Can you hear me now?” Good!”

Then he walked a little farther, “Can you hear me now? Good!”

I imagine sometimes God feels a bit like that ... calling out to his people ... “Can you hear me? ... Can you hear me now?” Yet in all the ways that God speaks to us, we often have deaf ears when it comes to hearing what God has to say to us.

Jesus said once, “Let those who have ears, hear.”

My grandchildren, when they were younger, like all children at the age of 2 or 3, would get into those moments of whining instead of just talking. I was impressed with my daughter, Annie, and her patience.

Instead of getting upset or losing her patience she would calmly say to them: “Use your words, please.” And likewise, when she would talk to them and they weren’t paying attention, she would ask them, “Do you have on your listening ears?”

Perhaps God sometimes wonders if his children have on their listening ears. We do say, just before the reading of the Scripture text, “Our ears are open,” as a reminder to put on our listening ears and to hear what God has to say to us from the written Word.

The boy Samuel, in our text today, had on his listening ears, but he did not recognize the voice of the Lord. The Bible says ‘the Word of the Lord was rare, in those days, as were visions, and while Samuel was serving in the temple, working with the old priest, Eli, he actually did not know the Lord yet.

Ah, but the Lord knew him! Even before he was born, God knew Samuel and had great plans for him as a prophet and judge, and as an important instrument for change in the governing system of Israel, as they moved from the judges as rulers, to the first king, ... Saul ... and then to the throne of David.

Samuel’s mother, Hannah, had prayed fervently for a son for years and years. She had been tormented by her husband, Elkanah’s other wife, Peninnah – who did have children. Her husband loved Hannah and tried to convince her to not be upset about it, but Hannah was so distraught that she cried and cried and prayed to the Lord, asking for God to give her a son.

She promised that he would be dedicated to the temple as a servant of God. God heard Hannah's prayer and soon she had little Samuel.

When he was a very young boy, Hannah kept her promise and took him to the temple to be trained under Eli, the priest.

It was there in the temple that Samuel first heard the voice of the Lord calling his name – "Samuel. Samuel."

Samuel thought it was Eli calling him and he ran asked what he wanted. But Eli had not called him and told him to go back to bed.

Again, he heard – "Samuel. Samuel." Again he ran to Eli and was told to go to bed.

After the third time, Eli began to realize what was happening and he instructed Samuel to answer the Lord, "Speak for your servant is listening." And he did.

The first call from the Lord was not a pleasant mission for it meant telling Eli, his mentor, his priest, that God was changing things in a way that would mean hurt and devastation to Eli and his family.

But, the boy Samuel was trustworthy and delivered the message of the Lord. And the Scriptures say "All of Israel came to know that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord."

God knew this boy ... this gift whom God had created and given, and God knew the plans he had for Samuel.

In our reading from the Psalter - Psalm 139, the Psalmist writes:

*¹³For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.*

*¹⁴I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.*

*¹⁵My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place.
When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,*

*¹⁶your eyes saw my unformed body.
All the days ordained for me
were written in your book
before one of them came to be."*

Even before Samuel knew the Lord, or had any idea of what God's plans for his life were, the Lord knew Samuel and loved him and called him to service.

This 139th Psalm was one that Elsie May Dennison used to like to quote. Elsie May was one of my parishioners from back home who passed away at the age of 100. She liked the part that said,

*⁵ “You hem me in—behind and before;
you have laid your hand upon me.”*

She would say, “I’m told God has a purpose for me. I’m just sitting here, waiting to see what that purpose is.” But she trusted that, even at the age of 100, God’s hand was upon her and she had a calling. I suggested that very possibly, at that time, her calling was her ministry of prayer.

Today, we have the joy and the awesome responsibility, of baptizing a child of promise. She is a child who was longed for, prayed for; a child who is a beautiful gift from God.

Abby Hope has been known by God, her Creator, from the time she was conceived. She has been blessed with the love of her wonderful parents and grandparents and Godparents.

This child is blessed to have, not just one, but three church families as her dad and mom are members of one church and her dad is commissioned to serve the other two.

Of course, the blessing is ours as well. She is a God-sent child of promise to us all, as are all our children! We rejoice in her life and in this great day when we witness and take part in her baptism.

Just as Hannah prayed to God for the gift of a child and promised God that she would make sure that child grew up knowing and serving the Lord; here at the waters of baptism, parents still today make promises for their children.

They are asked to profess their own faith, and they covenant to do their best as Christian parents to raise their children in a Christian home, teaching them faith, as well.

The Godparents also promise to help, and so do we! As we answer the question asked in the service – “Do we, members of the church of Jesus Christ, promise to guide and to nurture Abby by word and deed, with love and prayer, encouraging her to know and follow Christ and to be faithful members of his church?” we are not just answering for this particular congregation but for the Church universal – or as we say in the Apostles’ Creed, the one holy catholic church.

Baptism is a sacrament, commanded by our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a sacred place where we bring ourselves and our children at the beginning of our journey of faith. It is a place of promise where we are marked with the water and the sign of the cross; it is a place where we are grafted into the family of God, sealed with God’s grace.

The promises we make at baptism are intertwined with God’s promise to be with us, to guide us, to claim us as God’s own children. I somehow imagine that God tweeks our ears so they can listen better and hear God’s voice whispering our name on a dark night when we feel alone; shouting our name when we are going the wrong way in life; calling our name – wooing us to follow, to serve, to grow, to learn, and to love as God loves us.

Abby’s parents have had their listening ears on and open. They have heard the call of God and they are bringing forth their child of promise so she too will be able to hear.

As we witness the baptism of this precious child of promise today, may we all remember our baptism – if not literally, at least spiritually, and know that we are a promise and that we have a gift to use for serving a God who has marked us in baptism as His very own.

All of us can be assured that *we too*, have been known by God, from before the time we were conceived. God has hemmed us in and laid his hands on us ... not just so we can enjoy the relationship ... not just so we have blessing upon blessing, which we *do* have ... but because God has a vision for us all ... to love Him and to serve Him in some way, and to reach out to those who are hungering for him.

God had a plan for us, even as we were being created. And the more in tune we are to hearing His voice ... the tighter we have our listening ears screwed on ... the closer we will be to walking in His will and being the servant of the Lord.

Is God trying to get your attention ... trying to find some place where your reception is strong? Is God still calling your name, saying, “Child! Child! Can you hear me? Can you hear me now?”

As a baptized child of promise, may Abby and may all of us eagerly say, “Speak Lord, for your servants is listening.” Amen.

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