

Head and Heart

14th January 2024 Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings

1 Samuel 3: 1 - 20

Psalm 139: 1 - 6, 13 - 18

1 Corinthians 6: 12 - 20

John 1: 43 - 51

Meantimers !

Many may recall childhood memories of hearing the story of the child Samuel and how when serving in the shrine at Shiloh he heard God calling him. As with some of us, God had to call several times before Samuel recognised his voice! Reading the story now I hope we can see that it was a small chapter in a much bigger work of God. The circumstances surrounding Samuel's childhood have some startling similarities to common world and people stories. Hannah a loving, God honouring, childless woman longing to be a mother, endures the humiliating taunts of a more successful second wife to Elkanah who seriously tries to be a reconciler. Such was religious life in the House of God at Shiloh that the elderly priest, Eli, could mistake earnest prayers of a heart-broken woman for drunkenness. Eli was failing in both strength and authority. His sons, Hophni and Phineas, expected successors to the priesthood, abused their father's position. They had introduced corrupt practices into acts of worship and sacrifice for their personal gain. At this time the whole country was threatened by enemy invasions from neighbouring Philistia. Samuel's call from God contained a harsh reprimand and a warning for Priest Eli and his family. It was also the prelude to change. Change from enemy oppression to national victories, from Priestly rule under divine authority to national monarchy with the appointment of king Saul. Much military turmoil followed before Samuel was called to anoint the renowned King David. There are some great stories in the books of Samuel which, sadly, bring to mind the present troubles in the Holy Lands.



Reading this part of the story again, one small comment glared at me from the fuller text. *In the meantime .. the boy Samuel grew up in the service of the Lord.* (1 Samuel 2:18-21) Against the backcloth of appalling social, political, and religious corruption God was at work with part one of his plan for renewal in all those three aspects. The main characters in the stories were called to be 'meantimers' -waiting for and working with God's purposes. The same theme is repeated in the other scripture readings for today.

The Apostle Paul often had problems with church members. It's helpful to know that's not new! Christians at Corinth came from a variety of backgrounds with differing religious and moral values. Many preferred to discuss and argue more than to believe and accept Paul's words. Here, some felt that being set free from the sinfulness of pagan ways gave them licence to interpret Christian conduct to suit their own relationships concerning power, wealth, sex, marriage, and food.

Paul heard words and phrases which are not uncommon today. *'Why shouldn't I? It's my life. I know how to live it right!* The apostle's answer is directed to them individually and to the whole church together. When you are united to Christ it is his life you are living, not yours. You have received the Holy Spirit enabling you to live the Jesus way. Live as he does. You are the Jesus 'meantimers.

The gospel reading is a meantime instance too. Following the popular response to John the Baptist's preaching and call to repentance, Jesus began to gather his close helpers. They came first from those to whom John had pointed him out as *the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!* John, his friend Andrew, and Andrew's brother Simon who Jesus would call Peter, had come with others from Galilee. Jesus returned with these to Bethsaida by the sea. There he found a friend, Philip with whom he had previously shared thoughts about religious life and faith. Jesus invited him to join them. Philip was so excited he went off to bring Nathanael who, like himself and other contacts of Jesus who lived in an increasingly multiracial environment, were sceptical about religion and weary of synagogue worship and authority. It was an epiphany moment for Nathanael as it dawned on him that the Nazareth carpenter's son was more than that – in fact, Son of God! These first Jesus people were *meantimers* – in between believing and active discipleship for the Kingdom of God. During the following three years they were to hear Jesus speak many times of how living as *meantimers* would lead to much greater things when, after his death and resurrection, he would come again to consummate the Father's work and purpose for the whole world – and beyond. *Watch and Pray* was his constant word to them as it is to us.

I hear this simple phrase from the Samuel story as a word for us today. We are seeing upheaval in national and social life, together with the decline and closure of many churches. It's the time for us who believe to be the *meantimers* - people gathered for prayer as we watch God work through our love-reach towards all our neighbours. A people ready for his coming to do new things with his people, or even coming to consummate the Father's work of creation and recreation.

A Prayer based on Psalm 139

Lord, I'm glad that from time to time I may come to you for a whole person check-up – body, mind and spirit stripped to your view. You are beside me, I cannot run away or miss the appointment. You know every detail of my life; What I'm thinking, when I'm working, when I'm resting when I'm worrying! Everything about my life is kept in your secret records. The thought can be fearful, but you are both loving father and mother to me. The thought is humbling for me, but being small before you is where faith grows. The thought is assuring to me, to know you are all around me wrapping me in love. Thank you, Lord. Let the check-up appointments be regular and often.

