

**Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2018**

**Joint Valley Service**

**1 Samuel 3 -God speaks to Samuel**

Play a game of “do this, do that”.

How many of you like to be told what to do? Children, teenagers – how many of you like to be told what to do by your parents? How many of you jump into action to do as you’ve been asked straight away?  
Adults – how many of you jump into action when you’re told what to do by someone else?

I remembered this quote I read a while ago, perhaps you’ve heard it too, it says this: “No matter how old you are, no matter how tough you think you are, when a toddler hands you a toy phone you answer it”

Maybe the answer to those questions from a minute ago depends on who’s asking or who’s telling you what to do...

You see, in today’s Bible story there’s a boy - Samuel. And he’s working with an old man called Eli. Every time Eli calls, Samuel comes. No matter what Samuel’s been doing or where he is or whether it’s day or night, Samuel comes to Eli when he calls. How many of us are like that? How many of us willingly jump out of bed in the middle of night when someone calls our name? Even parents who we trust to come when we call sometimes are tempted to remain in bed rather than get up again!

And in this account of Samuel going to Eli, it’s not even Eli calling him! Three times Samuel rouses himself from sleep and goes to Eli, ready to assist and Eli says it wasn’t even him who called Samuel’s name!

Game – guess that voice – play several soundbites from different people and see if they can guess who it is that’s speaking.

How did you know that voice was a particular person? (You’ve heard it before, you hear it lots, you know what their voice sounds like)

Well in the Bible story, Samuel hadn’t heard God’s voice before, he didn’t know what it sounded like. So he just thought it was Eli calling to him.

Samuel shows great faithfulness to Eli. He followed Eli’s instructions. Samuel’s role was to follow Eli, to follow his instructions, to listen to him and to learn from him.

So when, in the middle of the night, Eli tells Samuel it’s not him calling Samuel, it’s God, Samuel knows that he should follow Eli’s instructions to reply to God by saying, “Speak Lord, your servant is listening.”

And Samuel did just that, and he heard God’s voice and began to recognise it as God’s voice. And Samuel was given a job to do by God.

Samuel wasn’t given an easy task but he followed God’s direction and instruction. And Samuel was not only used by God on this one occasion, but went on to be a judge, a high priest and a prophet, one of God’s messengers who was known throughout the whole region.

Samuel's role under Eli was to listen and learn from him, to trust that he knew what God's voice sounded like and so could tell Samuel when it was God calling him. Samuel's role with God was to listen and learn, to trust that God wanted to use him and could use him.

Eli's role was to support, teach and encourage Samuel. And also to hear and accept that what Samuel told him in the morning, had actually come from God. He had to respect that Samuel could hear from God just as clearly as he himself could.

I love the story of Eli and Samuel because it reminds me that not only does God use everyone of all ages but that we need each other. Each of us need an Eli and a Samuel in our lives. Samuel obeyed Eli, listened to him and learned from him, someone more attuned to God's voice than he was. That enabled Samuel to hear God's voice and be used by God. Samuel needed Eli. The young needed the old.

But Eli needed Samuel too. Eli encouraged Samuel, taught Samuel but then was taught by him as well. Samuel reminded Eli of what God had said and taught him that we can learn from those who are younger than us. The old needed the young.

This Year of the Young Person is an opportunity for adults to get alongside young people in a more meaningful and conscious manner – we can look for ways to be like Eli to the children and young people we know and meet – we can teach them and encourage them and listen to them. We can realise that God has as much to say and do through them as he does through us! And young people, this is your opportunity to be heard, to hear God's voice and to begin to make a difference.

Sometimes people get confused saying that children and young people are the future of the church, that's not true. Because children and young people are the present of the church – they're part of the church now just as much as any of the adults. They are not simply future leaders of the church, they are leaders of the church today.

Young people – God can speak to you if you choose to listen, he calls you and will use you. God knows your name, just as he knew the name of Samuel and he will never give up on you. Tell us how we can help you. Adults – listen and encourage your young people, they can teach you so much about faith in God.

Pray – Father God, today and in the coming days, weeks and months, help us to listen for your call. And, when we hear your call, help us to answer "Here I am". Help us listen to one another, encourage one another and learn from each other what it means to follow you.