

Ps 139; 1 Sam 3:1-20; 2 Cor 4:5-12; Mk 2:23-3:6

Life-Giving Presence of Jesus

Look at the worship line-up in your bulletin this morning. There are first things: praise, greeting, announcements, not really part of worship. Then we come to the first “Prayer.” In church history, and even today in more formal worship settings, the first prayer of the service is called “Prayer of Invocation.” To invoke is “to call.” So, can we call God to join us for a time of worship? I do not put “Invocation” there because who am I to say, “God is not here” – then we call Him – and then He is here. It is God who calls you and me. As I pointed out last week, we join in the eternal, continuous praise and worship of God when we decide to meet and open a service together. We can also worship God alone or in a small group. God calls us, we do not call God. To worship and praise is to hear God and to respond. We need to listen deeply.

The human heart – the human spirit – is formed for worship. Like the magnetic needle on a compass, you and I are drawn to God’s presence.

It is here that we find Life – the Source of our life both in this world and the next.

The picture we have today is of young Samuel, wearing the little robe his mom, Hannah, made for him when he traveled to Shiloh to serve the Lord. And of all the Samuel-stories, this is the most winsome. Samuel hears his name in the night and presumes it is the priest Eli calling him. Makes me wonder how many times I have mistaken God's call, thinking it was someone else. Samuel is a special boy. God has a plan to use him in the very making of the nation Israel.

God called Isaiah, God called the Patriarchs before him. Today, God calls Samuel to wake up and be in God's presence. The writer of the book warns us at the beginning of chapter 3: "The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread." (v 1) We might say, "This is news?" Let us not give in to cynicism in our own time. It is enough to say nobody expected this call that came to Samuel – nor the extraordinary life he lived in service to God. His ministry bridges the old-time Judges and the era of the prophets that followed. Look for a

moment at a passage at the end of chapter 2 of Luke's Gospel: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor." (v 52) Listen again to 1 Sam. 3: "As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground...for the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel...and the word of Samuel came to all Israel." 1 Sam 3:19-4:1)

The Prophet Samuel resembles Jesus in this closeness to God – being in God's presence and living that life to the full. We catch a glimpse of Messiah before His arrival. On this side of the Cross of Christ, we are called to live a life ordered by God's presence in us and with us.

Paul explains the Life of God in us as "treasure in clay jars." The great glory of the resurrected Lord shining out of us for all to see. Not human glory – but the very presence of the Son of God when the body of Christ shows up. May we humbly practice getting out of the way so others can see Him! We boldly pray, "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done." May God bring His kingdom to bear in every matter before us. It is safe to say that the nations in 2018 are in as much turmoil

and trouble and idolatry as they were in the 11th c BCE, when Samuel lived. Rulers ignore God's commandments – armies are stationed at national borders and city limits – people are migrating away from hot-spots of strife and terror.

Yet, here is a beach-head of the kingdom of God -- wherever God's people live out our lives in Christ's presence. Paul proclaims that our witness of Jesus celebrates at all times: His life, His death and His resurrection. In the afflictions and persecutions we experience, we derive hope and power to persevere by the treasure inside us. It is not that we receive Christ and never have another bad experience. Rather, His presence in us makes us resilient on account of His grace. We learn to trust that God's light is always brighter than the darkness, and life is stronger than death.

The gospel writer, Mark, tells the story of Jesus with a lot of shock-value. It is the shortest and most abrupt of the four gospels. Today's passage shows how Jesus scrapes a lot of old, manmade traditions from the Law of God. First, his disciples are hungry on a Sabbath, so they are

pulling off heads of wheat or barley and eating. A church lawyer would say they are doing labor on the Sabbath – and are therefore sinning. But, Jesus says, “No, remember how King David’s men ate the show bread in the house of God when they were famished.” Jesus sets the matter right: The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath. It is Jesus’ day.

Also, Jesus openly does the “work” of healing a man with a crippled hand on the Sabbath in the synagogue. Once more, Jesus teaches the people that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. But, the jealous and mean-spirited church leaders start to plot to destroy the Lord of Life. Jesus’ teaching is true – but it was rejected by the power brokers of the day.

This very Lord lives in you when you surrender your will to His – your ways for the ways of His kingdom. You are always alive with the past, the present and the future. We are shaped by the stories of God’s people (Abraham, Sarah and so many others) – the Word of God already written in the Bible -- PAST. We stand firmly and courageously in the events now unfolding in our

world -- PRESENT. We also look to God's promises with trust and faith. Jesus will establish a new heaven and a new earth: a home for you and me – plenty of room for all His people (FUTURE).

Whatever obstacles you are facing, you are a citizen of the New Jerusalem. Our life is in Jesus Christ now and forever. Amen.