

January 17, 2021
MLK Service

“The Impossible Dream”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake

Scripture Readings:

1 Samuel 3:1–10 (11–20)

3 Now the boy Samuel was serving the Lord under Eli. The Lord’s word was rare at that time, and visions weren’t widely known. 2 One day Eli, whose eyes had grown so weak he was unable to see, was lying down in his room. 3 God’s lamp hadn’t gone out yet, and Samuel was lying down in the Lord’s temple, where God’s chest was.

4 The Lord called to Samuel. “I’m here,” he said.

5 Samuel hurried to Eli and said, “I’m here. You called me?”

“I didn’t call you,” Eli replied. “Go lie down.” So he did.

6 Again the Lord called Samuel, so Samuel got up, went to Eli, and said, “I’m here. You called me?”

“I didn’t call, my son,” Eli replied. “Go and lie down.”

7 (Now Samuel didn’t yet know the Lord, and the Lord’s word hadn’t yet been revealed to him.)

8 A third time the Lord called Samuel. He got up, went to Eli, and said, “I’m here. You called me?”

Then Eli realized that it was the Lord who was calling the boy. 9 So Eli said to Samuel, “Go and lie down. If he calls you say, ‘Speak, Lord. Your servant is listening.’ ” So Samuel went and lay down where he’d been.

10 Then the Lord came and stood there, calling just as before, “Samuel, Samuel!”

Samuel said, “Speak. Your servant is listening.”

11 The Lord said to Samuel, “I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of all who hear it tingle! 12 On that day, I will bring to pass against Eli everything I said about his household—every last bit of it! 13 I told him that I would punish his family forever because of the wrongdoing he knew about—how his sons were cursing God, but he wouldn’t stop them. 14 Because of that I swore about Eli’s household that his family’s wrongdoing will never be reconciled by sacrifice or by offering.”

15 Samuel lay there until morning, then opened the doors of the Lord’s house. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. 16 But Eli called Samuel, saying: “Samuel, my son!”

“I’m here,” Samuel said.

17 “What did he say to you?” Eli asked. “Don’t hide anything from me. May God deal harshly with you and worse still if you hide from me a single word from everything he said to you.” 18 So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him.

“He is the Lord,” Eli said. “He will do as he pleases.”

*19 As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground.
20 And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the LORD*

John 1:43–51

*43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.”
44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” 46 Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” 47 When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” 48 Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” 49 Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” 50 Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” 51 And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”*

Sermon “The Impossible Dream”

If I was a preacher that just focused on today’s scripture in the Bible. I would not have struggled so with today’s sermon. Both of today’s readings are great scriptures to preach from but that isn’t what I was taught at Eden. I can remember like yesterday, Rev. Dr. Peggy Way teaching us that a good preacher is one that preaches with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.

But what she couldn’t have prepared me for was what to preach when a holiday to honor a man that embodied biblically driven, non-violence to advance human rights follows a time of unprecedented violence in our nation’s capitol during a global pandemic.

This week Dr. King’s Dream feels like a pipe dream, an impossible dream that can never be realized because we can’t seem to move beyond our past, our selfishness, and our baser instincts for violence.

Last Sunday when we met, it was all still too fresh, I think we were all in shock and frankly broken hearted that this was happening in our country’s capitol.

I have been stuck all week asking myself. What do these faithful, peaceful, loving people I serve need from me, from the scriptures, from our God, from the words of Jesus.

I guess what has been blocking me is my own feelings, my own outrage and disappointment not just as an American but as a Christian. As a person who has committed her life to following the one who first taught us the path of non-violence, the one who showed us the path of service, turning the other cheek and loving one another I was appalled by the number of crosses and Christian symbolism, that were brandished so proudly at the insurrection.

(See Slide) There were crosses on shirts, on flags, on tattoos. There were images held up of the Bible and many signs that said “Jesus Saves”.

But folks, I think we have to start thinking about saving Jesus. This misunderstanding, misuse, and frankly abuse of Jesus is, in my opinion, an abomination and wrapping our cross in the American flag is Idolatry.

Our churches are dying at unprecedented rates because Jesus has gotten a bad name by being attached to the bigotry, sexism, science denying, homophobia, violence, intolerance and ignorance of these extremists. None of which accurately represents our Lord. The violence certainly doesn't represent the republicans I know and frankly it scares me.

I can't imagine my life without God and the idea that people who see all this will be turned off to our faith is heartbreaking. We all need to believe in something, we all need to believe that something out there believes in us. This kind of toxic religion will cost people the peace and joy that comes from living a life in faith.

God needs us to be committed to showing the love of Jesus, just as visibly, as these folks showed their twisted version of Jesus wrapped in an American Flag, holding a gun, bent on destroying what so many have died to both create and preserve.

You may say, but pastor I am up in years, what can I do, stuck in my house. But look at both of the scriptures this morning. They are call stories. Stories about being called into service of God. Eli was up there in years, stuck in the temple and blind but God used him to help the young confused Samuel figure out that God was calling him into a life of service.

The gospel reading also gave us a glimpse of how to handle this place we find ourselves. I have read this Gospel reading a hundred times but I noticed something that I had noticed before. We see Phillip issue an invitation to Nathanael to come and meet the Lord, Jesus of Nazareth. But Nathanael says something down right rude and nasty, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

But Phillip and Jesus don't take the bait, they don't argue nor do they dismiss Nathanael because he's sarcastic and hateful but instead they win him over. Jesus even compliments him and gets him excited saying follow me, you haven't seen nothing yet-- bringing out the best in him by showing him grace. Much like Dr. King said “Hate can't drive out hate, only love can do that.”

We will get through this, we will begin to believe in our dreams again, in the Lord's dream, where thy kingdom come and God's will be done and believe in Rev. Dr. King's Dream that "one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all of us are created equal."

May we be part of that force of God's love, that drives out the hate from this land. AMEN

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-- Rev. Susan Drake