

## *Growing for Ministry*

19th Sunday after Pentecost – October 10, 2004

### Sermon Background Study

#### Scripture Passage

1 Samuel 3:1-11,19 (NRSV)

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

<sup>2</sup>At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; <sup>3</sup>the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. <sup>4</sup>Then the LORD called, “Samuel! Samuel!” and he said, “Here I am!” <sup>5</sup>and ran to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” So he went and lay down. <sup>6</sup>The LORD called again, “Samuel!” Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” <sup>7</sup>Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. <sup>8</sup>The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. <sup>9</sup>Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

<sup>10</sup>Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” <sup>11</sup>Then the LORD said to Samuel, “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle.

<sup>19</sup>As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground.

*Today, we begin a four-week series entitled “Growing for Christ.” We’ll be looking at growth – in our ministry, in our commitment, in our relationship with Christ and one another, and in our life as St. Andrew. We will look at the opportunities and challenges that God has put before us as we consider our stewardship of all that God has entrusted to us.*

#### Transition

There are times in the lives of persons, organizations, and even nations that straddle periods of transition. I don’t mean just any change, but rather the move *from* the past to a very different future. I built a few businesses in my career and I saw first-hand that organizations reach certain stages in their growth where it seems that nearly every part of the business must learn to do things differently – and often at considerable risk. I sometimes analogized this transition to a rocket that must shed its booster as it transitions to the next phase of its journey; you wonder if the rocket is going to stay in one piece! What you know is that there can be no turning back; you move forward and grow or you fall back and eventually collapse. When we meet the boy Samuel, the Israelite tribes are in such a time of transition.

*The Promised Land seems to hold little promise*

It was more than a thousand years before Jesus, and darkness had fallen across the Promised Land. For nearly

#### Growing for Christ

At St. Andrew, we are committed to “inviting others into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ and one another through worshiping, learning, loving, and serving.” This is our vision for our church. Since we adopted this vision statement a couple of years ago, we’ve explored its implications in several sermon series, including the August 2004 series on *Inviting*.<sup>1</sup>

In this series, we turn to *growing*, not only growing in our relationships with Christ and others, but also growing *for* Christ. If you want to find a purpose for your life, there is no better place to begin. We are all called by God to make disciples of Jesus Christ. This necessarily means that we are all to grow continuously in our own discipleship *and* to grow as a community of disciples. Each day, we are to seek to be a better disciple of Jesus than we were the day before.

1. The first sermon series for which I wrote background studies was an eight-week series on the St. Andrew vision statement. These are all posted on-line at [www.standrewccl.org](http://www.standrewccl.org) on the Sermon Background Studies page. The full library of studies is available on that page.

200 years, the Israelites had conquered and settled Canaan. Though God had been their king,<sup>1</sup> the generations of Israelites had been caught in a descending spiral of godlessness and violence. Unwilling to embrace and live out the covenant they had made with the LORD God, “all the people did what was right in their own eyes” (Judges 21:25). In the midst of this darkness, an Israelite woman named Hannah wept bitterly because she could have no children. She prayed to God that she would conceive, promising to dedicate her child to the LORD’s service if God would only grant her request. Hannah did conceive, bearing a son whom she named Samuel. True to her word, when the boy was still very young, Hannah took him to be raised in the house of the LORD at Shiloh, by Eli, the priest, and his sons. She “left him there for the Lord” (1 Samuel 1:28).<sup>2</sup>

But the darkness had settled even upon the LORD’s house at Shiloh, for “the sons of Eli were scoundrels; they had no regard for the LORD” (1 Samuel 2:11). In this troubled house, all we are told about the boy Samuel is that he “continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and with the people” (2:26). Yet, Samuel’s life would change dramatically in a single night.

#### *Samuel’s call to ministry – and our own*

One evening, the boy is sleeping in the tent sanctuary<sup>3</sup> near the ark of the covenant when he is awakened by a voice. Thinking that he has been called by Eli, Samuel hops up and runs to Eli’s room. But Eli, probably thinking that the boy has been dreaming, tells Samuel to go to bed. It

#### Samuel – Judge and Prophet

Samuel would go on to be a key transitional figure in the story of Israel. He was Israel’s last judge and the first in a line of prophets who would anoint the kings of Israel and, later, Judah.

The Israelites wanted a human king like other people had. In 1 Samuel 8, the tribal elders gathered to demand that Samuel appoint a king. God reassured Samuel that the people were rejecting God and not the judgeship of Samuel. Samuel brought to the people God’s words of warning: they would regret that they ever asked for a king, for kings are takers. But, in the end, God relented and told Samuel to anoint a young man named Saul as Israel’s first king. When Saul proved to be a big disappointment, God told Samuel to anoint David as the second king of the united Israel, even while Saul was still king.

1 Samuel 25 records Samuel’s death. We are told that “all Israel assembled and mourned for him.” However, in 1 Samuel 28, Saul calls Samuel’s ghost back from the grave to help out in a battle against the Philistines! But Samuel reminds Saul that God has handed the kingdom to David for a reason.

happens a second time and, again, Eli sends the boy back to bed (if you are a parent, you can picture this). Samuel is awakened yet a third time and this time, Eli seems to realize that something big is going on. Eli tells Samuel to go back and say to the LORD, “Here I am, for you called me” (3:8).

And so God calls the boy Samuel to a life of ministry, saying, “See, I am about to do something that will make both ears of anyone who hears it tingle,” for God would let none of Samuel’s words “fall to the ground” unheard. The young boy would grow to be the one who would lead Israel from the darkness of the judges to the seeming hopefulness of the first kings.

What a wonderful story of God’s call. Of course, we need to realize that God’s call is not restricted to a voice in the night. Sometimes, we might think that God’s call is restricted to those who are called to the ministry of the ordained. Indeed, I was asked recently when I would answer God’s call to ministry – even though I left the business world and am full-time on the staff of St. Andrew! The truth is that we are all called to ministry and we are all called to grow in our ministry. This does not mean that we are called to work for a church, but it does mean that we must all examine our priorities and ask ourselves what we are doing every day to advance the kingdom of God.

<sup>1</sup>In contrast to all the peoples around them, the Israelites at this time had no earthly king. God was to be their king. During the two hundred years or so between their entry into Canaan and the birth of Samuel, the tribes of Israel were governed by warrior leaders called judges. Samuel would be the last of the judges.

<sup>2</sup>I hope that you will take the time to read through the stories in the opening chapters of 1 Samuel. The stories are detailed and poignant. Imagine what it must have been like for Hannah to turn her beloved son over to Eli, knowing that she would see him only once a year – such commitment.

<sup>3</sup>At this time, the Ark was still kept inside a tent sanctuary. The permanent temple in Jerusalem would not be built until the reign of Solomon, well on the other side of the transition led by Samuel.

## Daily Bible Readings

*(these are readings from the story of Samuel, his life and ministry)*

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

Day 1 1 Samuel 1 The birth of Samuel	Day 2 1 Samuel 3:1-4:1a God calls Samuel
Day 3 1 Samuel 7:2-17 Samuel as the Judge of Israel	Day 4 1 Samuel 8 The people demand a king and Samuel delivers a warning
Day 5 1 Samuel 12 Samuel addresses Israel	Weekly Prayer Concerns

## Sermon Notes

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### October Book Recommendation: *Flannery O'Connor: Spiritual Writings*

This book is a change of pace from my usual recommendations. Flannery O'Connor was one of America's greatest 20th-Century writers. A southerner and a Christian, O'Connor wrote honest, direct novels and stories that explored the darkness and the hope in the human experience. She took pride in being what she termed a Christian Realist. Portions of her letters, as well as some of her fiction writings, can be found in this introductory volume.

### Mark Your Calendars – Nov 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>: Dismantling the DaVinci Code

At 9:30 in Wesley Hall on Sunday mornings Nov 7<sup>th</sup> and Nov 14<sup>th</sup>, Scott Engle will take a look at many of the claims made in Dan Brown's *The DaVinci Code*. Though this is a work of fiction, many Christians have taken seriously Brown's claims of impeccable research. Was Jesus married? Was the claim of Jesus' divinity invented hundreds of years after Jesus' death? How did we get the New Testament? Who was Mary Magdalene? Do the gnostic gospels help us understand Jesus?

Please join us as we consider these questions and more.

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

In the middle of the night, God calls young Samuel to a life-long prophetic ministry. (Remember, in the Bible, prophecy refers much more to *forthtelling* than *foretelling*.) I doubt that you've heard a voice in the night, but that doesn't mean you are not called to ministry by God – you are; we all are. All Christians are called to the making of disciples. All Christians are called to a life of caring and serving. In short, all Christians are called to ministry.

A few Christians are called to a life in the ordained ministry. Others might work full-time or part-time in a church. But most Christians work at jobs and careers that are not directly related to the body of Christ. I spent many years working for one business or another. It is not hard to understand why many Christians have trouble grasping, much less embracing, their own call to ministry.

What do you think it means to say that all Christians are in ministry? What are we really talking about? How do you see yourself being in ministry? What does this imply for our priorities? Our commitments?

Let's get concrete about this. In a given week or month, how much of your time is devoted to ministry toward others? How much of your financial resources is devoted to ministry toward others? I once knew a man who lived comfortably in retirement, but went back to work so that he could give 100% of his earnings to a program of his church! What sort of ministry is that? What ministry opportunities does St. Andrew provide each of us? How does the fast growth of St. Andrew generate ministry opportunities for us all? What can we all do to become evermore effective ministers?