

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany, January 14, 2018.**

As I looked at the lessons appointed for today, I could see a relationship between lesson one, I Samuel, and lesson three, John's gospel. How the second lesson, Paul's letter to the Corinthians, fit in this relationship was less obvious. Let's give it a shot.

And let's start with lessons one and three. Here's the question: what do these lessons have in common? The answer is: someone gets passed over.

In I Samuel (**I Samuel 3:1-20**), it is Eli who gets passed over. Eli is used to speaking with God. He has been doing so his whole life. He is the father of the family, after all. In this lesson, Eli assumes that God is once again talking with him. And so does Eli's son, Samuel. But it is not God talking with Eli. It is God talking with Samuel. Not through Eli, but directly with Samuel.

Those of us with adult children know something about this threshold, this time in a family's life when one generation gives way to the next generation. It's an awkward time, and it can take time. Out of love perhaps, the older generation is reluctant to place the burden of leadership on the younger generation. And, out of love perhaps, the younger generation is reluctant to assume the leadership role. But it happens. It needs to happen.

The relationship of God to Eli and God to Samuel isn't the same, but it's close enough to give us pause. If we, the older generation, are fortunate, the outcome of the threshold transition will be positive, as it was for Eli and Samuel. Eli says to Samuel, "Don't hide anything from me." And Samuel doesn't hide anything. To which, Eli says, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him." The result was "As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground." In other words, whatever bad might have happened didn't happen. A very good outcome.

In John's gospel (**John 1:43-51**), we have Philip and Nathanael. We're not sure what the relationship is between the two. What we do know is that Philip had agreed to follow Jesus, and told Nathanael that he, Philip, and others had found "the one about whom Moses and the prophets had written." In short, Philip

wanted Nathanael to get to know Jesus as well. Nathanael asks Philip, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip, probably the older of the two, says, “Come and see for yourself.” But, before Nathanael can greet Jesus, Jesus greets Nathanael. “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is not deceit!” Philip probably thought to himself, “Jesus, you don’t even know this young man.” But Jesus did know him: “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Philip didn’t even have a chance to introduce Jesus. Jesus introduces himself. In a way, Jesus passes over Philip, and goes right to the newcomer. “You will see greater things than these ... you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending.”

Again, one generation gives way to the next generation. It’s the way things work. The transition can be awkward for both generations, but also necessary. In this episode, there is a good outcome for Nathanael, and, over time we presume, for Philip.

Which suggests that the concept of “passing over” might better be expressed as “passing the baton.” Imagine running the third leg of a 440 relay and not passing the baton to the one prepared to run the fourth leg. The time for the 440 will be slower, and the one who has practiced to run the fourth leg and win the race will feel let down.

The moral of these two lessons is something like “Our children are probably better prepared to pick up the leadership role than we give them credit for.” Add to this advice: “Also, give God a chance.”

Okay, now to Paul’s letter to the Corinthians (**I Corinthians 6:12-20**). Some context. The early Christian communities went through growing pains. There were two big issues. One issue was how to meld the Jews who believed the Messiah had finally arrived and the Gentiles who hadn’t been waiting for centuries. The second issue applied to both groups, and it had nothing to do with who had been waiting and who had not been waiting. It had to do rather with the nature of human beings to sometimes do what they know they shouldn’t do and sometimes not do what they know they should do. Sound familiar?

If you are in a leadership role, as Paul was, sometimes you praise people for a job well-done, and sometimes you remind people what is expected. Paul did a lot of

both. Sometimes praise is featured in our lessons, and sometimes not-so-gentle reminders are featured. Paul is being a parent here. And we, the sometimes disobedient children, are behind the woodshed.

Which takes us to today's Psalm (**Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17**). Remember verse 1: "Lord, you have searched me out and known me; you know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar." Translation: You know me fully, and yet you still love me and forgive me and want the best for me and for those who come after me. And to drive this point home, you sacrifice your only begotten Son, that I might have a second and third and fourth chance to recognize this love, to give thanks for this love, and to share this love with others, including the next generation."

This spirit of thanksgiving is captured in today's collect: "Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that thy people, illumined by thy Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshipped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth."

The good news in this spirit of thanksgiving is that there is plenty of work for all of us, whatever our age, whatever our place in the generational line-up, whatever our place in the community, whatever our strengths and whatever our weaknesses. And the even greater news is that this "plenty of work" doesn't have to be tedious. It can be joyful. We are on a winning team, after all. We're part of a winning family. We are in sync with the Creator of the Universe. We have found our groove, because God has not only found us, but has saved us, even from ourselves.

Here's one more reference to our first reading today. Remember this verse: "Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him." So, Samuel goes to his father, and asks, "What should I do?" Eli responds, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'"

This is a terrific passage, with an important lesson for you and me. Samuel didn't have to go to his father, but he did. He sought the father's wisdom. One generation learning from another. And Eli didn't have to offer any advice. He

could have let his son struggle. But, no, Eli offered his son good advice. One generation serving another.

What's not to like about how parent and child handled this whole business? And what's not to like about a God who expects and promotes this kind of cooperation? And what's not to like about this God, who, also out of love, forgives parent and child when they acknowledge their shortcomings? And what's not to like about this God, who, really out of love, is willing to sacrifice His own son to underscore the importance of this cooperation?

And finally, what's not to like about the author of today's psalm who notes about this God – verse 13 – “I will thank you, God, because I am marvelously made; your works are wonderful, and I know it well.”

Amen.