

*This Talk was prepared and preached by Lay Reader, John Matthews for Evensong which took place at Tallud Ste Gemme on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2013*

TALK      16th June 2013   Tallud Ste.Gemme   EVENSONG

*1 Samuel 3:1-10*      *Acts 10:1-8*

We have just heard in our readings the starts of two of the best known stories in the Bible. The Old Testament reading involves Samuel. Samuel's mother, Hannah, had prayed passionately for a child and promised God that if he gave her a son she would give the child back to him to serve him all his life. She was true to her word, and Samuel was taken as a young boy to live permanently in the temple, where he served the priest Eli.

In this evening's passage, Samuel hears so vivid a call that he thinks its Eli calling him from the next room. Eventually, of course, through Eli's guidance, he realises its from God and finally answers God's call by saying, 'Here I am, Lord. Speak, your servant is listening'.

Eli was an experienced priest in the temple, but was now old; exhausted, and dispirited by the scandalous behaviour of his two sons, who were also priests but who thoroughly abused their positions - and he had never been able to keep them on the straight and narrow. The call from God to Samuel required him to tell Eli that he was going to severely punish him and his family for their failure to obey him.

Imagine how you or I would feel in Samuel's position! A young lad asked to deliver a most unpalatable message to an old and respected priest. However, encouraged by Eli to speak openly and honestly, Samuel delivers God's judgement message.

What Samuel didn't know was that Eli had already been told by God of his impending punishment - but the important lesson we pick up from this incident is that whatever it entails, once we've heard God calling us, we need to respond and take action.

In later life Samuel was called by God to undertake many different roles, as judge, priest, prophet, and counsellor. He anointed the first two kings of Israel and was the last and most effective of Israel's judges.

Samuel was enabled to undertake his very significant roles in later life because, from childhood, he was genuinely listening for God's directions and, having served him well in small things he was entrusted with greater responsibilities.

The New Testament reading, from Acts marks the beginning of the story of Cornelius and Peter, where both receive messages from God. Cornelius has a vision in which he hears from an angel that God has noted his faith and generosity and asks him to send men to guide Peter to him. The next day while Peter is waiting for a meal to be prepared, he also has a vision, where he sees heaven open up and a sheet descending in which are a variety of animals and birds.

A voice then says, 'Get up, Peter, kill and eat'. Peter, a Jew, while recognising that it's God speaking to him, says, 'I can't do that. I've never eaten anything that's profane or unclean'. God repeats his command but Peter remains puzzled. While he's trying to work it all out, the men sent by Cornelius arrive at his door.

Peter invites the men in and in the morning goes with them to meet Cornelius. When he gets to the centurion's house, he finds Cornelius has invited his relatives and many of his close friends round. A sort of first-century Home Group, and all Gentiles( non-Jews). As Peter explains to them about the life and love of Jesus, the Holy Spirit descends and fills all those present. Peter then realises the real significance of his vision; that God is impartial, nothing and no-one he's created is profane or unclean, and that he welcomes both Jews and Gentiles into his kingdom.

A number of aspects of Cornelius's character are mentioned in Acts, chapters 10 and 11:

- he actively sought God
- he revered God
- he was genuinely meeting other peoples needs, and
- he prayed regularly and frequently.

Cornelius's vision and his reaction to God's call demonstrate that God reaches those who really want to know him. It reinforces the fact that there are people everywhere who are eager to believe and that the Gospel is for everyone.

Some thousand years earlier, once he had listened to Eli's advice, Samuel had responded to God's call and went on to help God reshape history. In the same way, God's use of Cornelius to influence Peter's thinking was to have a profound effect on the development of the Christian Church. Peter, as promised by Christ, became the rock on which the ealy Church was built, while Cornelius himself probably had a major influence on the spread of Christianity through the Roman empire.

God answers the sincere prayers of all who seek him by sending the right person or the right information, at the right time. But are we equipping ourselves to recognise his guidance or his call. Regular prayer and reading of his Word will ensure we are ready to respond when he speaks to us.

Like Samuel and Cornelius, we may need guidance from others that its God calling us,- and let's not forget that God uses all sorts and conditions of men and women to spread his Word, so no-one with whom we are in contact is to be ignored.

We don't know what will happen as a result of our response, that's down to God, but let's ensure that, when the call comes to us, we are there with the response, 'Here I am, Lord. Speak, your servant is listening'.