

Peace Sunday 2018

The story of Samuel is a beautiful tale of awakening and of the whole process of growing up.

If you know the wider story then you will remember how this little child was so longed for by his mother, Hanna. He was the answer to many years of waiting and praying for a child.

Given that yearning it is almost inconceivable to us that Hanna then presented that same son, in early childhood, to the Temple! Yet that is what she did.

We meet the young boy there in our first reading. He sleeps in the sanctuary but he does not yet know the Lord or recognise God's voice. And hence his clumsy childish efforts to be helpful by repeatedly waking up the old priest, Eli: *Here I am, since you called me!*. Until the Elder realises what is going on and teaches Samuel what to say: *Speak, Lord, your servant is listening*.

This story offers us a profound reflection on our humanity. Despite his odd upbringing, Samuel has this one great gift: he knows in the core of his being that he was longed for - and therefore he knows that he is lovable before any adventures in loving come his way. Leaving home, even in childhood (as he does), is not the trauma that we might expect - because he is already 'at home with himself'.

We might stop here for a moment or two. This is a nice image of human development which might give us each some food for thought:

Do I have that profound gift of knowing that I was always wanted? Or am I scarred by being told I was 'a mistake'?

Did others communicate to me that I brought joy, or did I learn too early on that I was a burden?

Have I discovered, along the way, how to be free, willing and generous in helping others - or have I stayed needy, greedy, closed, defensive?

Have there been 'Elis' on my road who called **me** - wise men and women who have shown me how to live well and how to choose?

Whatever my story so far, have I now found my voice to speak with God?

But maybe Samuel's story is actually more of a challenge to ourselves than we first realise. Samuel becomes a prophet because he learns to hear and to trust God's calling of himself. First he learns to move beyond his own impulses and desires in a life of willing service: *Here I am since you called me*. But then he discovers something more: deep openness to the One who is love, justice, mercy, and the source of hope: *Speak Lord your servant is listening*.

It is thus the ministry begins that leads at last to encounter with God's Chosen One, the shepherd - in his case David, whom he anoints as King.

This Sunday is kept as *Peace Sunday* in England and Wales, when we are invited to reflect on the message of Pope Francis for the *World Day of Prayer for Peace*. Pope Francis message this year is particularly striking - he says: *The migrant and the refugee are seekers after peace.*

Certainly, fleeing violence is often the 'push-factor' which makes them risk everything to leave their homeland.

All too often the media view them as nothing but trouble. They are spoken of as threats, a danger to our national identity, our security, our livelihood.

The assumption in the popular imagination can be that they are 'extremists'. In a few cases that will sadly be the case - but most refugees are simply seeking to survive.

Whatever religious or political views they may hold there can be little doubt about the extremity of their need once they are 'on the road'.

Without being naive, the Christian starting point is to acknowledge that these people are **our brothers and sisters in the human family**. Once we do that things can change markedly:

We will be set free from prejudice to recognise that their needs and their desires are just like our own.

And we might begin to grasp that they could be more gift than threat, potential partners in the search for peace in our broken world, and in human development. After all, immigrants have enriched the countries which have graciously accepted them and given them a place in society - we have only to think of the social history of the United States of America, of Australia, and indeed of Britain itself.

Two prayers are all that is needed for us to begin the journey to 'prophetic living' - a way of being that literally makes sense, offers meaning to the present, and hope for the future: *'Here I am since you called me'* and *'Speak, Lord, your servant is listening'*.

If we pray those prayers - really pray them - we will find our own prophetic voice. We will become a sign, and an agent, of the coming of Christ and of his Kingdom. Working with our neighbours, old and new, we will seek together the peace God wills for all humanity. In this way, collaboratively, we will further establish upon the earth that peace which all our hearts desire.

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