

Sermon
15 October 2017
West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

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Text: 1 Samuel 3:1-19

Baptism: West Kirk

I just love the Old Testament stories. Real stories of real people – sometimes breathtakingly beautiful; sometimes messy and twisted and shocking.

The Bible is not full of stories of perfect people leading perfect lives. But... The Bible is full of stories of people who, although they lived quite ordinary lives, always had God as part of their story.

And because of this, no matter how these stories start, they always turn out okay in the end...

Look at the story of Samuel, for instance. It makes Coronation Street look like a fairy tale!

There was this man, Elkanah, quite a respectable guy, who had 2 wives (see what I mean?!). One was called Hannah, and the other Peninnah.

My dear husband's response to this is: How can any man in his right mind marry 2 women?! But let's not go there...

So of course, as is to be expected, Elkanah had a favourite – Hannah. And this made Peninnah green with envy. But, as well as a husband who adored her, Peninnah had it all. A good name and plenty sons and daughters. Hannah on the other hand, didn't have any children.

So Peninnah would provoke her and make fun of her – because in those days the ONLY important job a woman had was to give birth to sons. And Peninnah enjoyed making Hannah suffer because she wasn't half the woman Peninnah was...

So when Hannah couldn't stand this anymore, she went to the temple and prayed to God to please give her a son. She was so emotional, that the priest, Eli, thought she was drunk!!

She promised God that if he gave her a son, she would give him to God.

So God gave her a son, and she called him Samuel, which sounds like the Hebrew for "heard of God", and once he was weaned, she took him to the temple, as she promised she would.

And this is where our reading began.

The boy Samuel stayed with the priest Eli in the temple. And then one night God called Samuel. This was his first proper encounter with God, so when he heard someone calling, he thought it was the old priest Eli. But eventually Eli realised what was going on, and he told Samuel to listen to God.

Poor Samuel did, but he probably got the fright of his life. Because not only did God appear to him in a vision (something that didn't happen to just anybody, but did happen quite frequently in Old Testament times), but he gave him the most awful news. He had to tell the good old priest that his whole family was going to be wiped out, because they disrespected God and didn't listen to his warnings.

Of course he would prefer to keep quiet about the content of *this* vision, but Eli forced him to spill the beans.

Much to Samuel's surprise, Eli took this bad news very calmly. He knew it was coming at some point, and he respected God way too much to question his decisions.

And then we get to my favourite bit of this story, verse 19: "The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground."

Samuel grew up to become a true prophet of God, and because he *listened* to God and had the guts to speak God's word, his own words got wings, and people listened.

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Family, drama, difficult situations – sounds quite similar to our lives, doesn't it?

We live thousands of years later; we do things differently; God speaks to us in different ways now, but one thing stays exactly the same:

If God speaks to us, we should listen.

It took him a while to realise that it was God speaking to him, but once he realised, Samuel listened; and obeyed. Even though that must have been the most difficult thing he'd ever had to do.

In amongst all the busyness of our lives, all the difficulties we have to face and complicated situations we have to handle, if God speaks to us, we should listen. And obey.

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I would like to tell you another wee story this morning. A story which is not written down anywhere – yet. And that is the story of Linda Tierney.

Linda is from Polbeth.

In 2015 she was diagnosed with cancer. She was operated on and the tumour was removed. She underwent 18 weeks of chemotherapy. And then she went into remission.

For a year.

But then the cancer came back, with vengeance. And this time round, they can't do anything for her.

Linda was devastated when she heard the news. But then she decided she wasn't going to allow this news to get her down, she was going to accept it, and make the most of the time she has left.

Which would probably not be more than a year and a half, she was told.

So she sat her 2 boys and her partner down, and told them. They didn't take it well, and she had to console them.

But she stayed strong. She got all her affairs in order, phoned me to talk about her funeral, married her partner – because she wants him to grieve his *wife*, and not just his partner...

And now she is doing everything she can to just make special memories for her family.

I'm not saying that any of this is easy for her to do, but she is making sure that they are having special times, with smiles on their faces.

Something all of us should be doing all the time.

She also decided that she wants to help give other people comfort in dying too, so she will be the new face of Marie Curie when their new campaign starts.

And it is she who is arranging this family fun day on Saturday at the Almondvale suite at the Livingston Football Club on Saturday, hoping to raise £6000 for cancer care – for other people...

She heard God call her, and she listened. And now she is making a difference, despite the fact that it must be really hard. And she is doing this with so much enthusiasm, you would never guess that she isn't at all well.

So let's help her by taking home baking or sweets to Polbeth Harwood Church on Friday between 4 and 5pm please. Let's help Linda to give

her actions wings, to let none of the good she is trying to do fall on the ground.

Linda isn't scared of what the future holds for her; instead, she is thanking God for this time to make a difference and say goodbye.



..... and – God spoke to you to, and you listened: you broughtto be baptised today. Be true to the promises you made. That wee boy has his whole life ahead of him. His story will also have amazing parts in it, but it will most probably have tricky and difficult and sad parts in it too. Like Linda's, or Samuel's; but let me assure you – when God is part of your story, no matter what happens, it will turn out okay.

We all have the rest of our lives ahead of us. We don't know whether our days will be many or few, whether the rest of our stories will be easy or difficult.

But let's make sure that if God talks to us, we listen. So that nothing we say or do will ever fall on the ground. That even when our lives are falling apart, we'll still get to the other side in one piece, because God is with us. We are never alone.

Amen