

SERMON: 2018/06/03 (2nd Sunday aft. Pentecost, Yr. B - Track 1) - 1 Samuel 3:1-20; Psalm 139:1-5,12-17 & Mark 2:23-3:6\_BTR

Before I invite the children (up) front, I just want to offer you some quick remarks about how Anglican churches like the Episcopal one approach the Scriptures on Sundays:

The Church year, for us, begins with Advent - usually around the last week of November, and that's when we're introduced both to *Revelation* - the final book of the Bible - *and* to a smattering of Old Testament prophetic texts - spanning almost a *thousand* years[n.1] - that concern the birth of "the Christ," Jesus, among the Jewish people; we then hear about that (exciting) event at the end of December, of course; and then in the Spring we sprint through His life, "touching" on (only) a few major episodes, to arrive at the climactic weekend of (all of) history, His crucifixion and resurrection.

The rest of the year, then, is for "filling in the gaps," which is an important work to fully grasp "the purposes of God."

To that end, *this summer*, we will be focusing mostly on Mark's gospel, and also tracing a "line" through the time of Israel from after their settlement in Canaan.

[Invite children to the front.]

What is "the Sabbath"?

Well, this morning we heard how, one day, Jesus and His friends, the "Apostles," were walking through a field of wheat.

([Hold up some stems.] That's this plant, which I found growing in my yard. You make bread from it.)

And as they were walking, some of them began to 'pluck' the "heads" off [pluck], absent-mindedly, probably.

We've all done something similar on a hike, I imagine. [pluck]

The texture feels nice on your skin, doesn't it?

The action is almost soothing.

And even though they were minding their own business, some other people who were near them saw this and shouted, "Oi! Stop that. That's not 'lawful!'" [Mk. 2:24]

Now, they weren't objecting to the fact that that wheat must've belonged to a local farmer - and we should *always* treat other peoples' belongings with care and

respect.

No, what *these* complainers were unhappy about was the fact that this was happening on 'the Sabbath', and God had decreed that *it* was supposed to be a (special) day of rest - either Saturday or Sunday - in the "Ten Commandments," [Ex. 20:8].

But, what does "rest" look like (exactly)?

[Wait for response? Is it being fully asleep? Does watching TV count? Mowing the lawn? Swimming in the pool?]

So, there's some disagreement!

And some people thought that the action of "plucking" wheat-heads [pluck] was *not* restful, and therefore would make God angry or despair.

But Jesus disagreed:

There's not some hard, fast rule as to what counts as rest and what doesn't. This is a very *personal* matter.

I, for one, enjoy gardening and find that "restful" - to a degree.

Others, though, would find it a tiring chore.

And this is why we hear Him say, "'The sabbath was made for humankind.'"

It is a gift!

A gift from God - who understands us and knows our individual needs because He made each one of us (as we heard the Psalmist just say this very morning).

Let's pray: ...

[Ask children to leave.]

The key line I'd like us to "dwell" on is this from verse eighteen, and I quote: "'It is the Lord; let [H]im do what seems good to [H]im.'" [1 Sam. 3] [Pause.]

Our Old Testament reading concerned two, *pivotal* characters - "pivotal" because their lives - their "ministries" - "bridged" two very different seasons in Israel's history: the time of conquest and the time of the Davidic kings.

And like "ying" and "yang," black and white or chalk and cheese, these "seasons" were completely different:

And the one didn't become the other over night, the change was a gradual, *painful* one; but also profound, *radical*.

Just as the invention of the steam engine and with it the industrial revolution

turned Britain and the entire world inside out, and on its head, drastically altering the lives of millions, turning entire nations away from their fields and animal-husbandry, and caused massive, unprecedented urbanisation with all of its attendant problems in ways that no one, really, predicted;

...so the successful settlement of Canaan by the Israelites and their transformation from bedouin desert-raiders to coastal city-dwellers was a "rubicon" moment of the most enormous significance, and Samuel and Eli, they were at the centre of the maelstrom.

Not just present at the "watershed," but also, actually, to an extent, responsible for it.

And the part Samuel would play in all this begins here at the start of chapter 3, but only as the consequence - a reaction to - the life of his mentor, Eli.

And it was Eli who I quoted.

Frankly, we know very little about him.

He was a priest before there was even a church: he carried out his duties in the tabernacle, the richly embroidered tent made to house the Ark of the Covenant, which stood on a hill called Shiloh: [1 Sam. 1:9].

And had done for many years - this was where Joshua left it before his death [Josh. 18:1], and it functioned as a sort of supreme town-hall and a courthouse - like the House of Congress in D. C..

And as such, Eli, therefore, despite the paucity of detail that we've left to us, was, *seemingly*, almost a *presidential* figure - one with 'servants' [1 Sam. 2:13]: the *highest* authority in the land.

And even though he was unelected and had no official leadership role besides his duties of performing and managing the sacrificial system, people would come and ask his advice, and for him to settle disputes, and pass judgments about various matters. [See: 1 Sam. 1:25]

And with that responsibility came lots *and lots* of prestige; privilege *and* power.

Well, Eli appears to have been a very humble, God-devoted man; almost oblivious to the worldly opportunities - opportunities for embezzlement and corruption and easy-living - that his position afforded; and he was well-loved by the people and by our Father in Heaven.

But his sons, on the other hand, were 'scoundrels': [1 Sam. 2:12]

Born into luxury and advantage, they got "drunk" on it.

And isn't that one of the oldest stories about humanity?

About the pitfalls of nepotism.

Of sons with "silver spoons" riding on their fathers' coat-tails.

It needn't be so, but often is.

And they exploited their father's role and standing, and didn't just finagle with those who visited Eli, but hired thugs to intimidate and threaten them: [1 Sam. 2:15-16], and even, we find, sexually-assaulted some of the women, [1 Sam. 2:22].

And his response to all this was pathetic:

He looked the other way, and hoped, I guess, *vainly*, that, one day, they'd outgrow their rebelliousness; and take seriously their faith and the responsibilities that came with it: they were, after all, his sons, Levites too; destined to take Eli's duties upon his death.

But his passiveness; his unwillingness to confront and upset them - to *challenge* them to be more faithful, didn't go unnoticed: and God spoke to Samuel, one of Eli's students, and gave him this message: "...Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering forever."

It was a threat - and a *grave* one.

Remember: the Israelites would kill lambs and doves and other creatures at the Tabernacle as a gesture of repentance for sins that they had committed, and, according to what He had promised on Horeb-Sinai, God would forgive them in return: [Ex. 29:35-37].

But now He says to Eli that He wouldn't just go on forgiving and forgiving *ad nauseam*.

That His patience has limits; and He wouldn't be, *graciously*, bought off forever.

And yet *still* Eli doesn't really budge: he responds by saying "Let Him [God, that is] do what seems good to him"

In other words, "Meh!" "Whatever." "Che sera."

But this passivity, this laissez-faire attitude about the spiritual "trajectory" of his sons was inexcusable.

And so it is also for us, for we, says Saint Peter, are a 'royal priesthood' too, [1 Pet. 2:9].

He should have known, better than most given his vocation, that children are *precious* to God [Mk. 10:13-14,16], that He has 'plans to prosper [them]' [Jer. 39:11], *but also* that He won't wait forever and their salvation isn't guaranteed: They can't ride our coat-tails to into the new Jerusalem.

They need to get right with God themselves by a personal commitment to His Son; and we've a duty, therefore, *if we love them*, to help them; to *inspire* them.

And to that end there should, then, be *no* limit to what we will spend and do to

“bridge” any obstacles between them and the Lord.

Footnotes:

1. See: 'Old Testament Prophecies of Jesus', <https://www.thoughtco.com/prophecies-of-jesus-fulfilled-700159>