



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Pentecost 2, Proper 4 – Year B
June 3, 2018

[RCL]: 1 Samuel 3:1-10 (11-20); Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17; 2 Corinthians 4:5-12; Mark 2:23-3:6

1 Samuel 3:1-10 (11-20)

Samuel's first prophecy was one of judgment. One could almost imagine the weight of God's word to the young boy; his own teacher and master Eli will fall under God's anger for condoning the sins of his sons. He felt so bothered by God's words concerning Eli that he could not return to sleep, perhaps debating in his heart whether to echo what he had just heard. It was a challenging inauguration for Samuel the prophet, yet at an early age, he learned to listen and obey.

The story of the call of Samuel is a powerful reminder of our prophetic ministry. Indeed, the work of a prophet is not for those who are unwilling to listen. In our context, God's voice can be heard in the plight of the poor, in the silenced cry of the oppressed, of those robbed of justice and dignity. The prophet stands in the middle of the discourse between God and man, and in the midst of the human situation and theology. Instead of taking us to the lofty cathedrals of our minds, the prophets lead us to the gutters of society; they refuse to be detached from the grime of existence. Ultimately, the prophets teach us that the relevance of Christianity is neither dependent on elegant theological orations nor soaring declarations of faith but on how we meet people as they are – just as Christ did. And to the muffled voices beneath the glamor and glitz, we shall listen to God's voice crying with them and reply, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

- The prophet Samuel listened to a difficult message from God. How are you responding to similar messages from the pulpit?
- How is the church exercising her prophetic ministry? Are there existing programs in your parish or diocese for justice and peace?

Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17

Among the psalms, the words "I," "me," and "my," occur more frequently in this psalm. It is clear that the psalmist was reflecting on the "self," but also transcended it. The psalmist ended in pure glorification of the God who knows us more than we know ourselves.

It is undeniable that reading this psalm gives us a sense of reconnection with the God beyond the scholarly representations of him; sometimes, what people need to hear is the fact that God knows them, that even the

least of us stands with distinction and without apprehensions. In our quiet moments, it is refreshing to know that the God we serve remembers our frame and calls us by name.

- How does personal intimacy with God contribute to the vibrant worship of the church?

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

In the ancient world, the custom was to hold one's valuable possessions in earthenware pots for safekeeping. Alluding to this custom, Paul compares the paradox of God placing his Spirit on human hearts of clay. Paul marveled that we, the earthen vessels, have been enabled to bear so great a brightness and so rich a treasure. This evokes images of a flower blossoming from an ordinary and rough vessel, its roots sinking deep into the soil, tracing the contours of the pot while it grows into a thing of beauty, or an ordinary-looking trove filled with exquisite gems.

Paul's words are revealing—we are our Lord's vessels: bearers of his light in a world often engulfed in darkness. We carry the divine message of Jesus in such a way that our very lives, permeated by grace, become a backdrop of God's glory. Our life stories become songs revealing who he is.

- Think about your life story. In what ways has God revealed who he is in your life? How did you become a channel of his love and grace to others?

Mark 2:23-3:6

For the Pharisees, working during the Sabbath was a matter of life and death. Jesus' priority was the people. To emphasize his convictions, Jesus asked the Pharisees, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save or to kill?" He then healed before them the man whose hand was withered. Jewish law was clear: to heal was to work, and medical attention could only be given to those whose lives were endangered. The man with the withered hand could have waited, but Jesus would not allow another day of suffering for the man.

Jesus' act is a demonstration of the purpose of our liturgy; the integral reason behind the external acts at the altar every Sunday. We could be steeped in elaborate rituals and colorful expressions of our faith, but if we remain blind and deaf to the plight of those who clamor for love and to the tears of those who are afflicted, we are as good as an empty church—we are a hollow excuse.

Jesus' life was centered on service, a spontaneous and sacrificial call to challenge the bounds of religious legalism, a mission to make people's lives new and to respond to them in their need. To him, the next ministry opportunity would begin with the next person he met.

- How would you define religious legalism? How could we prevent ourselves from falling into a church of "dos and don'ts"?
- In this Season of Pentecost, how could you respond to human need in loving service as enshrined in the Anglican Five Marks of Mission?

Sunshine Dulnuan was given her name because of her father's favorite singer, John Denver. She is a third-year seminarian of St. Andrew's Theological Seminary in Quezon City, Philippines.