

Sermon – “Out of the Mouth of Babes”**Scripture – I Samuel 2 and Luke 2****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: January 7, 2021**

Thank you Josh and Tyler Malcolm! I swear those two guys were little kids when I last saw them at church and then suddenly (wham!) they are like teenagers! What happened in 10 months at the Malcolm house! That is what happens though, isn't it? I can't believe that Tracy and I have children who are now in their 20's. One day they are riding in the backpack carrier with their sippy cups and the next thing you know they are full blown adults.

I'm sure Mary felt the same. Last week I was cradling little baby Jesus during that traumatic time in Bethlehem now suddenly he's 12 and hangin' with the elders in the temple and when I blink next week he'll be an elder himself! Where does the time go?

It flies is where it goes and we who were the children then become the promising adults and the elders now and then eventually pass on leaving room for the next generations to follow. But sometimes what is required is for us adults and elders, well *before* we pass on, is to recognize the visions coming from our children and youth and how they challenge our lives and we need to not stand in the way of the world they are being called to create.

We have 2 portraits offered this morning of young boys growing into their role as the prophets God is calling them to be. I'm not sure if you are aware but Luke, the Gospel writer, told his story of Jesus' birth, with another story in the Old Testament clearly in mind and that is the story of the prophet Samuel. Hannah, who is barren, is miraculously given the child Samuel just as Mary who is a virgin

is given Jesus by the Holy Spirit. Mary's Magnificat that she proclaims – "my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my savior" – is a reflection of Hannah's song of praise that she offers upon learning that she is pregnant – "my heart exults in the Lord, my strength is in my God. The Lord raises up the poor from the dust heap and makes them sit with princes..." – that's from Hannah's song. Both Samuel and Jesus are dedicated to the work of God and both are found at about the age of 12 in the temple which is the time when a Jewish boy can begin learning Torah at the feet of the priests and elders. For both, their teachers, whether they are conscious of it or not, are not training them to follow in their footsteps but are raising them to eventually overtake and overthrow them.

Samuel, who is being raised and formed by the high priest Eli, will eventually prophesy against the house of Eli and his sons who are corrupt priests of the temple, just like Jesus will eventually will come into great conflict with the religious leaders of the temple and claim that their management of and presiding over the temple has become corrupt and a distortion of God's true purposes. In both instances, the elders are not thrilled... cause the word spoken requires them to relinquish their cherished traditions and beliefs and especially, where the real resistance comes, their positions of privilege and power. In the story of Samuel and Eli, Samuel prophesies against the House of Eli pronouncing judgment against Eli's sons' and that judgment is manifested in the sudden deaths of the two sons. Eli accepts God's judgement and steps aside for Samuel. And in Jesus case, he prophesies against the corruption of the temple and he absorbs the judgment himself BUT instead of assigning others to die in the judgment, he himself dies to open a new day.

And he becomes the model for us and the model is this – sometimes we have to die to make way for what needs to be born. Sometimes that might look like a literal dying but more often it's a figurative thing, that we must let go of what we thought was precious, we must sacrifice something dear to us, die to a way of being that is wrapped up in our identity, walk away from a scenario for a greater good than our own desires and purposes.

The Rev. Mary Luti suggests this in a recent writing she did called “Leave John in Jail” where she speaks of that scene when John has been arrested and is wondering if he's prepared the way for the right person in Jesus and the word comes back to him of what Jesus is doing. And she says that it must have been a relief to John on one level but stung on another for what he had to face was that God was doing a new thing and John was no longer needed and in fact Jesus leaves him there in jail and moves on. She goes on to say:

Leaving John in jail is hard. To turn from a great man, a great ministry, and past glory seems heartless. But if you don't tear yourself away, you'll miss what the spirit does next. There are always good reasons to hold onto the past, but the Gospel is a Word in forward motion. It won't let us live backwards into what was or might have been. We have to leave John in jail and go on.

In fact leaving things behind or getting out of the way can be generative even though it might feel like death and it takes some serious discerning and some serious courage especially for those of us in the second half of life to scoot over for those in the first half who have the vision that not only they must follow but for which we need to change for as well.

In the Spirit of Jesus and Samuel, I invite us to hear from a few of those young voices speaking powerfully in the world right now for change. How can we

hear them and others and what is being asked of us; how must we step aside, move over, let go, change course so that a new generation can begin the work of healing that is needed. It's not to let us off the hook but to acknowledge we are very much on the hook but also that it's very possible we don't have the answers but THEY do.

I am thinking of Little Miss Flint. Have you heard from her, how we have not been faithful in commitment to the common good when it comes to her people and her town? Listen to this...

Play Mari Copeny video from You Tube from 3:00-4:44

When we are debating policy and pontificating about government's role in our lives or not, sometimes we need a child to cut through the bologna and remind us simply of what is wrong.

I think also of Aalayah Eastmond who was at Marjory Stoneham Douglas High in Parkland when that school shooting occurred and is now an activist working to curb gun violence...

Play Parkland School Survivor video – play from 8:50-10:00

A child giving voice to the Word that needs to be spoken, insisting on a world where love and connection not hate and violence rings out and gets the last word. We need to step aside for her. And then of course there is Greta...

Play Greta Thunberg to World Leaders – play start to 1:00

How dare we? Did Jesus speak like this in the temple those days? We know he spoke like that in the temple later on and people did not like what they heard. We do not generally like to be challenged and told we must change until we feel the pain of things ourselves. But as followers of Jesus we are required to take the pain of others on ourselves, to be compassionate and responsive to the cry of

those in the wilderness of these days! Help us to listen O God and hear the voices of your children struggling for justice and liberation and give us the courage to change ourselves in order to make room for the world that they would build.

Alternate Ending....

I was going to end my sermon with 3 brief video clips from young voices speaking truth to power on you tube, but we found that You Tube flags those as copyright infringement and won't let us use them. So let me just lift up in word 3 prophetic voices on the modern day. Mari Copeny, otherwise known as Little Miss Flint, who is a 13-year-old who for the last 5 years has been speaking about the travesty of the Flint Water crisis and the abdication of responsibility that has accompanied it. Aalaya Eastmond who was at Marjory Stoneham Douglas High when Nikolas Cruz opened fire with a semi-automatic weapon of war killing 17 students there and she speaks passionately and beautifully against gun violence and the dire need for gun control. And finally, we've all heard of Greta Thunburg who is a passionate activist who raises her voice against our passivity around the crisis of global warming. I wish I could have shown you a few clips of them because it's their voice that you should hear on this particular Sunday when we consider Jesus in the temple. But I encourage you to search these names on the internet and see how these children are challenging us and leading us into the future. And the question for us - When will we be willing to step aside, to change our lives, to relinquish our grasp on what is strangling our earth and keeping others from breathing freely. May we hear the voices of the children, the way

God speaks to us through them and graciously make room for the world that they would build.