

Brackenhurst 18 Jan 2008
Master, speak. Your Servant Heareth

Welcome

Call to Worship:

Psalm

Anglican Collect

- Hymn 252 — All Hail the Power of Jesu's Name

Notices

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

- Hymn 136 — I heard the Voice of Jesus say

Offering

Prayer

Scripture:

1 Sam 3:1-10

John 1:35-42

- Hymn 535 — Master Speak thy servant heareth

Message

INTRODUCTION

- When I was much more involved with Youth for Christ, probably about 16 years ago, I used to go regularly to Youth Week
 - Was a week long leadership training and youth camp held at YFC centre Hekpoort just after Christmas each year
 - * They always had top class speakers from around Africa
- One year they had somebody from Malawi or somewhere in that area, and he said something that struck me, at the time, as being very prophetic
 - He said this, he said, "The curse of Africa is the greed of the leaders..."
 - * And he spoke about how African leaders cannot seem to help but take advantage of whatever situation they are in to enrich themselves.
- But of course, having become a little more aware since then I've realised that the same is true of leaders all over the world

- Who was it who said that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely?
- It seems as though leaders make all these promises about how they will be better than their predecessors
 - And yet when the moment comes for them to take office all those wonderful ideals go out the window
 - * You've noticed it?
- I was looking on the internet for a joke to tell about a corrupt leader, and there were so many:
 - Jokes about leaders American presidents, British prime ministers, the royal family, African dictators
 - * They were all there: Bill Clinton, George Bush, Barak Obama — and he's not even president yet
 - * Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, Robert Mugabe
 - Arabs and Russians, French and Canadians
 - * Only problem is that I couldn't repeat any in church!
- Yet I don't think that the behaviour of our leaders is unique
 - I would hesitate to blame just our political leaders without looking at our own lives
- We're very quick to judge, but if we're honest, we also take advantage of situations
 - We may well start out young with high ideals, protesting unfair actions, and calling for world peace
 - * And yet as we get older we become set in our ways
 - And the causes that we fought passionately for when we were younger seem like the dreams of a naive child.
 - * We realise that nothing is going to change
- This is not something that is new, but is something that has plagued men and women for thousands of years, and both of our readings this morning speak into that kind of situation
 - And speak even more deeply into the desire of our hearts
 - * That although we may have given up our protests, there is still a desire for things to be different and better
 - * There is a deep longing in our hearts
- When we look at today's lessons we find exactly the same situations are being addressed
 - When we go back and look at the context surrounding the story of the calling of Samuel we realise that there is a reason that he was called

- If you remember the story of Samuel it begins with young woman, Hannah, who is unable to fall pregnant
 - She prays to God and promises that if he gives her a son she will dedicate him to the Lord, and she tells this to the priest at the temple at Shiloh
 - * A man called Eli
 - In those days the priestly office was a family thing, and so Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas were also priests
- Anyway, Hannah falls pregnant, and as promised she brings her boy, whom she names Samuel, to Eli to dedicate to the Lord, and for him to train
 - However by this time Eli's sons have become wicked and corrupt, just as the leaders that we spoke about earlier are
 - * So there's a sense, and we're going to unpack the story a little more in a moment, that God raises up Samuel as a righteous prophet to take the place of Eli's corrupt sons
- And if we go back and look at the context of Jesus and John's ministry we see something very similar
- Israel at the time of these two also had a leadership that was generally corrupt
 - The so-called royalty of the day was upperclass Jews who had intermarried with the Romans for the purposes of obtaining power
 - The Sadducees and Pharisees, the ruling classes and the people who ran the religious systems were just as corrupt.
 - * And you will know that John's ministry was very much about condemning these practices (you snakes, you brood of vipers!)
 - And Jesus himself, of course, challenged them publicly on numerous occasions
- Now I've used the word 'corrupt' to describe these leaders that we meet in the Bible stories this morning, just as we would probably use the word to describe many of our leaders today
 - But what does corrupt mean?
 - * It means bad — Not bad as in incompetent, but bad in the sense of deviation from its intended purpose.
 - In the context of our stories this morning — and indeed of world leadership deviation from being a servant of the people revealing God's presence to them and making life easier for them
 - * to a place of self enrichment at the expense of the people
 - It is this deviation that both Samuel and Christ come to reveal and to restore

- If we are honest with ourselves, as I suggested earlier — it is easy for us to become caught in the trap of making a life for ourselves, and in the process to leave behind the idealism — and naivety — of youth.
 - So how do we avoid corruption in our lives? How do we avoid being deviated from our intended purpose as children of God.
- The answer is that we look to our elder brother, Jesus the Christ, to be our example
 - We Recognise the Christ
 - We Follow the Christ
 - We Share the Christ

(1) Recognising the Christ

- Part of our experience of life in general is that we become cynical
 - We leave behind the ideals of youth and we accept the world as it is
 - This is the ways things are, this is the way things always have been, there's little than we can do to change it.
 - * Yet that's not true
- If don't have to look far to see in the last twenty years all sorts of changes
 - The fall of the Berlin wall
 - The collapse of Communist Russia
 - A black South African president
 - And a black American one!
 - * Elected on the rallying cry of "Yes we can"
 - The incredible changes that people are making to try to save the environment
- But for any change and transformation to happen we need an alternative to be pointed out to us.
 - See, when I look at the story of the boy Samuel ministering under Eli and his two sons I see things happening at two levels
- Firstly we are told that the Word of the LORD (Yahweh) had not yet been revealed to him
 - He didn't know what was happening, really in the temple, he didn't know what was happening when Yahweh spoke to him
- So on the one level he could well have grown up learning to become a priest from Eli's sons
 - and simply perpetuated a generally corrupt leadership.
- But another way of being a priest is presented to him
 - Not by the flawed humans in the story
 - * But by God — Yahweh — himself

- God calls him, he responds, “Speak for your servant is listening’ and God tells him that Eli’s whole family is going to be judged for their corruption, which makes him very uncomfortable
 - And alternative way of being a priest is revealed to the boy Samuel
- The same things happens in John’s gospel
 - Crowds of people had flocked to see John who was preaching against the leaders of Israel
 - They were unhappy with what their leaders were doing and were looking for an alternative
 - * They thought that perhaps this could be John
- But John points Jesus out to them as the one for whom they were waiting:
 - “Look, the Lamb of God”
- We have become so caught up in the ways of the world that sometimes an alternative way needs to be revealed to us! Pointed out
 - Eli and John both point out to Samuel and others the way of God that is different to what they had come to expect
- So if we are to avoid becoming corrupt
 - That is, if we want to remain true to the purposes for which God created us we need to continually be called back to recognising the way of Christ
 - * In a world that makes it increasingly difficult to do
 - It’s difficult to recognise Christ, many different teachings and denominations, books, how do we know which is the right Christ to follow?
- I would like to suggest that the clearest sign of recognising Christ is the one who makes us most uncomfortable
 - It’s easy to follow Jesus as long as we see in him a reflection of our own ideas and prejudices
- I think when we discover a Christ who challenges our prejudices and makes us feel uncomfortable, who reveals to us an alternative way of life
 - That’s when we begin to see God’s Anointed
- The task God gave Samuel was to go against his master, to go against what he had begun to learn about ministry
 - and do something different
- The God revealed in Christ, and pointed out by John, was a God not recognised by the Pharisees and keepers of the law
 - was one who was different to what they had expected
- We need to eyes that are spiritually opened to a different Jesus to the one we think we know

(2) Following the Christ

- Secondly it's not enough to just recognise the Christ
 - It's all very well for somebody to say, "There goes the Christ", "If you want to be a good Christian, look that is the way to do it..."
- It's not just about recognising the Christ
 - "Yeah, he's a good guy, I kinda like his teaching..."
- If we are to have a meaningful walk with Jesus in which we avoid becoming corrupt we have to see that when we recognise the Christ we also have to follow the Christ
 - We have to do what has been revealed to us.
- In Samuel's case he was afraid to tell Eli the vision
 - Eli has to say to him, "Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you."
- Samuel had to follow God's commands, regardless of how difficult they were in order to become the person God had created him to be
 - in order to avoid becoming corrupt and just like Eli's sons
 - * And as Samuel grew up we read that Samuel continued to reveal himself to Samuel, and Samuel's word came to all Israel (4:1)
- Yet it is in the New Testament reading from John's gospel that I think we find one of the most evocative verses in scripture. (Jn 1:39)
 - John was out with two of his disciples, Andrew and someone else
 - * He points Jesus, the Lamb of God out to them
- They hear this and they follow him, and as they're following Jesus he sees them and asks what they want
 - And they answer with words that are both meaningless, yet at the same time filled with meaning:
- "Why are you following me?" "Rabbi, where are you staying?"
 - Kinda meaningless
- But then Jesus answers with those evocative words that are spoken to each disciple to truly desires to follow Christ
 - "Come, and you will see..."
- What an incredible promise! "Come and you will see..."
- I think that many people in the time of Christ and since then have had the Christ pointed out to them
 - Yet not all of them have followed
 - * And because they haven't followed they haven't seen
- It's not enough just to recognise the Christ
 - One has to follow as well

- And as we look at the literary context — the positioning of this story and these words in the greater story of John — following the Christ
 - is after recognising the Christ
- and has to be seen in context of John chapter 1: Though he came to his own, his own did not recognise him.
 - John begins his whole gospel describing how Jesus and the Father are one and how he came down to earth from heaven, and how he has been made known
 - * And the answer, “Come and you will see...” an invitation to the first curious disciples of John
- Is an answer to a question that all of us have
 - and a question that is posed in the first chapter of John’s gospel:
 - * “Where are you staying?”
 - * “Where are you God?”
- Yes, on the one hand, “where are you sleeping tonight”
 - But on the other, “where do you abide?”
 - * God are you only in heaven, or do you dwell with us here as well?
 - Are you only present among the rich and the religious
 - * or are you present — can you be present with us, the poor and and ungodly?
 - Are you too far away to meet my needs, or will you be with me in my time of helplessness
 - * “Where are you staying?” “Where are you God?”
- And Jesus answers “Come, and you will see.”
 - We will see, but ONLY if we go with Christ
- We cannot stand from afar and watch and wait to see what happens: “Oh, that’s Jesus over there, good guy, really enjoyed his sermon on the mount...”
 - We have to go to see for ourselves, at whatever risk to ourselves
- That means leaving what is comfortable and known
 - And going with what is dangerous and uncomfortable
 - * For Samuel it meant a whole new phase of ministry
 - For John’s disciples leaving a teacher whose teachings they had become comfortable with and going on to something new
- Are you still going with Christ, where he leads, or do you follow from a distance?
 - Interestingly, the distant followers are the ones who leave the soonest!
- “They went and they saw” — words that apply not just to that day, but to the whole of John’s gospel and they walked and lived with him
 - As the saw the places that he stayed and the things that he did
- And it applied to the whole their lives, and indeed, to ours.

- If we are to avoid becoming corrupt, if we are continue to be used for the purposes for which we were created
- It is not enough just to recognise Jesus, but we also are to follow him.

(3) Sharing the Christ

- And then finally as we follow the Christ, we are to share the Christ.
 - And this is where so often we fall short, and i don't mean that we are to go as Jehovah's witness knocking on doors asking people if they are saved and telling them about Christ
- It's more than that!
 - In the story of Samuel he wakes up and is compelled by Eli to share what the LORD Yahweh had told him
- In John's gospel verse 40:
 - “Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing that Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, ‘We have found the Messiah’...”
- As I said earlier there is a deep desire for a righteousness, for a leadership that surpasses what we see around us
 - A leadership that is different
- People have a hunger for God, and hunger for righteousness
 - they want to see leadership that challenges them, but is also an example to them
- They don't want religion to be an opiate that dulls their senses, that dulls them to the excitement that life offers
 - But a religion that opens them to all the excitement and geniuses of life
- And maybe that's what Andrew saw in Jesus
 - And maybe that's the way it should be
 - And maybe that's why many people reject religion in general and Christianity in particular
- Because instead of bringing life and light as it did in the person of Jesus it has become old and bring
 - It has become a religion which dulls the sense
 - * In which Christ is no longer challenging people because people are no longer willing to take the rick to follow him out of the comfort zone
- And so when we speak about sharing Christ we are not speaking about inviting people to organised religion

- But about saying to people “Come and see and alternative reality, an alternative way of life which contrasts and contradicts your preconceptions of religion and the world around you.”
- I have no doubt that people will flock to the faith that provides a genuine experience of the divine
 - A relationship that challenges, rather than just says everything will be okay
- But that brings us back to my first point this morning
 - Jesus needs to be pointed out
- We have become so used to doing things in a certain way, in a certain style, according to certain norms
 - That we need people who are hearing God’s voice in the night
 - People who are willing to stand up and listen to that voice even when it’s different to what they know
 - People who are willing to be John, to say, “There goes the Lamb of God”
 - People who are willing to take a risk and share what they have discovered in Jesus with those around them
 - * Who are willing to say, “We have found the Messiah”
- And I’m not just speaking about religion
 - I’m speaking about the light of the world.
- In a world of darkness, in a country of darkness when we look around us and it is so easy to focus on doom and gloom
 - To look at our leaders and see that they are all corrupt
 - To look at our people and see no regard for life or morals
 - To look at our country and see decay instead of opportunity and hope
- Today in our country more than ever we need to share the Christ, to reveal the light that the darkness has never put out.
 - It is we who recognise the Christ
 - * who follow the Christ
- who need to share the Christ
 - No one else is going to do it
- And we do that, as Christians by sharing with those around us a message of hope.
 - We become the people we are created to be and called to be
 - * Instead of being vessels that are corrupt
 - * vessels which have lost sight of their true purpose
- We become the vessels that we are called to be painting a different reality proposed by Jesus the Christ, the anointed One

CONCLUSION

- Let me close off
 - I began by speaking about the corruption that we see in the world around us — particularly in our leaders
- I said that it is easy for us also to offer a corrupt view of reality by buying in to that world, yet God calls us to something different
 - He calls us to paint a picture of how things could and should be
- And we hold fast onto that picture
 - By recognising who Christ is
 - * even when he is different to what we would like and expect
 - By following that same Christ and seeing where he lives
 - * even when we wouldn't like to go
 - And by sharing the vision of the world which he reveals to us
 - * even when it seems at odds to the world in which we live
- I pray that this would be so for you, even as it is for me as we journey together with Christ, discovering all that it means for our lives
- Amen

Prayer of response and Intercession

- Closing Hymn 898 — Who will save our Land and People?

Benediction

Doxology