

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
 God speaks to Samuel
 God raises up new leadership when the authorities become corrupt.
 Scripture: 1 Samuel 3:1-21
 Rev. Steve Filyk
 October 17, 2021
 Opening Hymn: Come thou fount,
 Chorus: Cornerstone, This I Believe (The Creed)
 Closing Hymn: Blessed Assurance

Do you trust your clergy?
 How about your neighbors?
 Do they trust pastors?

This past March, a poll was taken in Canada that
 Assessed the level of respect for 28 different occupations.
 Firefighters, nurses, and farmers topped the list.

Clergy were just a hair above the bottom quarter.
 Trusted a little less than lawyers and talk show hosts,
 Trusted little more than union leaders and business executives.ⁱ

But this was before the news broke about the remains of 215 children
 Found at the Kamloops Indians Residential school.
 Since then the public's stock in clergy
 Has definitely declined.

There's just so many terrible stories being told.

In a July Globe & Mail article Glen Jack
 Described the horrors he experienced
 While attending the school from age 5 to 13.

The beatings would come regularly – for speaking [his mother tongue]
 for not making his bed neatly enough,
 for missing a spot on the tiled floors
 that he was ordered to scrub with a toothbrush...

Sometimes the abuse would come in punches and open-palmed slaps...

Sometimes the priests used a strap.
 He remembers being thrown down the stairs
 and a priest standing over him afterward, laughing...

A few weeks into the school year, the physical assaults became sexual.
 As Mr. Jack lay pretending to sleep,
 he would hear the sound of approaching footsteps
 and then a priest would appear at the foot of his bed..."ⁱⁱ

There's so many stories about abuse at the hands of clergy
 That some of us have become calloused.

But imagine these kids as your own children.
 And then imagine these priests as your own pastor.

This can cause a crisis of faith.
 How is it that people who have taken vows of service,
 can be so predatory and abusive?
 And how can God let this happen in God's church?

The harsh reality is that God gives us freedom
 To love others or to abuse them;
 To follow paths of service or selfishness.

And yet in the midst of this,
 God won't abandon God's people

When the leadership has turned towards evil
 God raises up new shepherds to tend to God's flock.

We see this is the story of the people of Israel.

Today we have jumped ahead from Israel's first days in the wilderness,
 To Israel's arrival in the Promised Land.

In this land the people are blessed with prosperity.
 And yet they struggled to remain faithful
 To the God who had set them free.

But the same faithlessness
 That is found in the nation,
 Is mirrored among their own leaders.

Eli is a priest at the place of worship in Shiloh.
 He had been called by God to guide the people.
 And yet he fails to direct the very sons
 Who are apprenticing in his trade.

They dishonor God by appropriating for themselves
 the best of the people's sacrifices.
 They dishonor their nation
 by sleeping with the women
 who serve at the sanctuary entrance.ⁱⁱⁱ

Things are not well in Israel.
 Eli is aging and those who will follow him are corrupt.
 It seems like God has abandoned his people.

And yet today's story reminds us
 That while the word of the Lord was rare,
 The lamp of God had not yet gone out.

This presence is seen in the story of Samuel.

Samuel is an answered prayer.
A child of promise.

His birth was God's gracious response to a barren mother's plea.
In gratitude she dedicates his life to religious service
In the Tabernacle at Shiloh.

But God has more in store for him
That serving Eli by sweeping the floors
and polishing the brass.

One night God speaks to Samuel.

At first, he has no idea that it is God who is speaking to him.
But after repeatedly running to check on Eli,
He is advised to respond:
"Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

When he offers this acknowledgement
the Lord gives him his first message:
a message of judgment

Eli's sons have rejected God
and God will reject them in turn.
God will look elsewhere for leaders who will serve faithfully.

This is the beginning of Samuel's appointment
As not just a priest, but a prophet and judge for Israel.

Samuel will serve God faithfully
becoming "Israel's greatest spiritual leader since the time of Moses."^{iv}
Samuel will usher in the golden era of his nation.

And yet, just like predecessor,
Samuel's own children
Will fail to share his fidelity.

We are told that they "did not follow [Samuel's] ways.
They turned aside after dishonest gain
and accepted bribes and perverted justice."^v

PAUSE

It seems that in every generation
There are those use their position
To exploit rather than to serve.

In every generation leadership becomes rotten and corrupt.
God won't prevent the wrong people
From attaining power.

And yet at the same time

God is also leading into leadership
Those who follow faithfully.

Listen to the Rev. Cristino Bouvette
Describe some important moments in his calling:

“My vocation began to grow in me from a very early age.
Even as young as five-years-old,
I would celebrate Mass in my parent’s bedroom
early Saturday mornings while they were still in bed...

I would often say that I wanted to become a priest...
and a firefighter, and own a ranch and have twelve kids.
I didn’t quite get what being a priest meant, entirely...

People were quick to discourage me from the priesthood
as it meant I couldn’t have any of the other wonderful things
that I said I wanted, so my dreams were quickly dashed.

That is until one day when I was nine-years-old
and my dear Italian grandfather, *Nonno*,
called me over to come and sit with him on the couch.

In his gentle accented voice he informed me
that despite having a very large family
we had no priests or no nuns in it –
which was unacceptable.

Therefore, he proposed that I should become a priest.
Finally, someone who encouraged me!..

One day, near the end of grade nine,
while walking down the hallway,
the very tall and intimidating Mr. Pat Cullen,
math teacher and heavy pipe smoker
with white hair tinged yellow,

stopped me in my tracks,
stood over me and in his booming deep voice proclaimed,
“Cristino, I think you should consider the priesthood.”

I was speechless.
How in the world did he have a clue
that I had ever considered it?

As another teacher passed by,
Mr. Cullen solicited his opinion and dear Dr. Glashan agreed –
I was called to become a priest.

This incited unimaginable panic
as I thought I had moved past that embarrassing chapter of my life...

In the days leading up to [World Youth Day] 2002 in Toronto,
 our diocese held the standard *Days in the Diocese* celebrations
 for around 3,000 international pilgrims.

One of the events was an ordination of four men to the priesthood
 which would be held in our CFL football stadium.

There were over 5,000 people present...

At the point during the liturgy where the deacons
 soon to be ordained as priests lie prostrate on the ground,
 I was overcome by emotion.

I asked the Lord in my heart, "Is this what you really want from me?
 Must I lay down my life like these men?"

My friend, obviously sensing my distress whispered to me,
 "You know what, we shouldn't have to play guessing games with God.

If He wants us to be priests, let's just ask for a sign." ...
 During the silence after Communion I said to God,
 "Dear Lord, if You want me to be a priest,
 please just give me a sign."

No sooner had I finished that prayer
 I was tapped on the shoulder from behind.
 I turned around to see an old, short lady of Oriental origins
 leaning forward and without any introduction she said to me,
 "You are going to be a priest."

After a pause for what seemed like a thousand years,
 time which I used to try and remember how to speak,
 she then said, "Are you going to become a priest?"

I still couldn't speak
 so she asked one final thing, "What is your name?"
 I stammered out, "Cris";
 "Well Cris, I am going to pray for you
 until the day of your ordination."^{vi}

What you may find interesting is that Cris
 Has an aboriginal grandmother
 Who suffered abuse at the Indian Residential Schools.

This history made "Bouvette nervous to tell his kokum
 he was going into the seminary to become a Catholic priest.

[So imagine this response when he shared the news with her]

"she put her hand on my hand,
 and she said, 'Oh my boy,
 nothing could make me more proud.'"

She continued to support him,
 even sitting in the front pew at St. Mary's Cathedral in Calgary
 when [Cris] officially became a priest in 2012."^{vii}

There will always be people in power
 Who bring disrepute to God
 And disrepute to their vocation.

But lamp of God's Word has not yet gone out.
 God is raising up new leaders for his people.
 God is calling our sons and daughter,
 Our grandchildren into servant leadership

So that God's people will never be without a guide.

Maybe we are old and tired like Eli.
 Maybe we have no energy to reprimand our own children.

And yet maybe we can help others recognise
 How God is still speaking,
 And calling people to unexpected tasks.

Amen.

ⁱ "Canada's Most Respected Occupations 2021." CMR, 15 Oct. 2021, canadasmostrespected.com/professions.

ⁱⁱ Woo, Andrea. "Glen Jack experienced the horrors of the Kamloops residential school. He's been trying to get people to listen for 50 years." *Globe and Mail*, 17 July 2021, www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-glen-jack-experienced-the-horrors-of-the-kamloops-residential-school.

ⁱⁱⁱ See 1 Samuel 2:34-35

^{iv} McCreery, D. W. (2009). [Exegetical Perspective on 1 Samuel 3:1-10 \(11-20\)](#). In D. L. Bartlett & B. B. Taylor (Eds.), *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year B* (Vol. 3, p. 75). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

^v 1 Samuel 8:3 NIV

^{vi} "Do Not Be Afraid." Team Orthodoxy, 11 Oct. 2012, teamorthodoxy.wordpress.com/vocations/5stories/do-not-be-afraid.

^{vii} Flexhaug, Dallas. "Indigenous priest speaks of 'roller-coaster of emotions' for residential schools and Catholic church." *Global News*, 5 July 2021, globalnews.ca/news/7993681/indigenous-priest-family-residential-schools-catholic-church.