

Sermon preached at Gisborne, 26 December 2021

Mighty God, Move among us now with your Holy Spirit, that we might hear and experience the wonder and joy of the living Word as we seek to welcome the written Word into our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Luke 2:41-52

In my Father's house

The Temple was a place where God was said to dwell. It has more significance when it comes to Jesus as he was the living Temple of God.¹ The Temple played important roles for Samuel and Jesus. First, both were presented to God in the Temple according to the law. Second, in the Temple, Samuel was able to identify his calling. For Jesus, his identity as the Son of God was first revealed. Lastly, the church – *ekklesia*, functions as the living Temple of God.

Dedication or Presentation to God

Dedication or presentation to God is one of the duties of the parents that were performed in the Temple. Dedication comes from the Hebrew word *Chanach*, the same Word used in *Chanukkah*.² *Chanach* means ‘initiating, beginning, starting something off to serve God’s purposes.’³ It is to train a child in the way he should go as if the newly rebuilt Temple was solemnly dedicated to the Lord, so these children are to be dedicated as a Temple of the Holy Spirit while they are young and teachable.⁴ For Israel, Samuel’s dedication to God signals the beginning of the transition of authority from the one priestly order to the other.

After the dedication, Samuel began to live in the Temple. For him, the Temple was literally his home, and Eli was a surrogate father. Even in this early stage, there is a contrast between the life of Samuel (and his family) and the life of the sons of Eli. Samuel was devoted to minister before the Lords. As he grew toward maturity, he was in favour with the people and God. His maturity is witnessed at two levels – one was his stature in the human community and the other growth in his relationship with God.

¹ Mark 14:58 “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.’ ”; John 2:19-21

² Also spelled *Hanukkah* – the Jewish festival of the Lights

³ Proverb 22:6

⁴ <https://www.shema.com/the-dedication-of-name-of-child-1920/>

Similar to Samuel, Jesus was presented to God⁵ according to the Law. His parents were also pious as much as Samuel's. Unlike Samuel, Jesus revealed his identity when he was found in the Temple while engaging in discussion with teachers. Mary and Joseph surprised Jesus with their reproach when they found him in the Temple. Yet Jesus assumed that they knew where to find him. He was, of course, supposed to be in his Father's house. He was supposed to be busy fulfilling God the Father's salvation plan. In the Greco-Roman context, "my father's house ..." does not only refer to a specific location but also authority. Here, Jesus already showed the radical commitment to God – the Father. As we see it later, family relations were treated as secondary. Even so he obeyed his parents by returning to Nazareth with them. Like Samuel, Jesus experienced growth at two levels as well. He increased in human wisdom, and his relationship with God advanced in its maturity.

Transition and Replacement

Samuel's presence only confirms God's intention to replace the corrupted priesthood with the new one. The life of Eli's sons is portrayed⁶ in scandalous terms, leading to the judgment of God, which shows where priestly power and authority come from. God was doing a 'new thing' in Samuel, and Eli, who nurtured Samuel in faith, would be displaced by Samuel. It happened not because of Samuel's aggressiveness but because of God's commitment to the leadership of Samuel, who was fully in the service of and obedient to the purposes of God (Yahweh), who was going to reshape and renew Israel.⁷ God wouldn't entirely abolish the Temple but renew it through Samuel. In the case of Jesus, the new order and the new Temple that God will bring in is seen through Jesus words: "Didn't you know that I must (*dei* – "it is necessary")⁸ be in my Father's house?"⁹ It is to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God - a fact first told to Mary by the angel in Luke 1:35 - and soon to be affirmed by God at Jesus' baptism.¹⁰ Jesus will also speak of God as his Father.¹¹ The moment that Jesus' identity was revealed in the Temple signalled the beginning of the total replacement of the Temple made by hands with the living temple of God in Jesus.

⁵ Luke 2:22-38

⁶ 1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25, 27-36

⁷ Brueggemann, Walter, *Interpretation – First and Second Samuel*, p24.

⁸ cf. Luke 9:22 The son of man must suffer many things; see also 13:33, 17:25

⁹ Luke 2:49b

¹⁰ Luke 3:22

¹¹ Luke 10:21-22; 22:29, 42; 23:34, 46; and 24:49.

Ekklesia – the church

The role of the Temple for the calling of Samuel and Jesus' identity requires a fresh understanding of the church in this COVID time. Unlike the Temple in the Old Testament, the church can mean both – a physical building and a spiritual building. Firstly, the church – *ekklesia* is not a temple, but more about a congregation called by God.¹² As the Greek meaning suggests, the gathering of those summoned by God is the church in which we worship God and have fellowship with one another. Worship, baptism and fellowship are essential activities in the church. When we were baptized, it was not only an event of presenting us to God, but we made a new family connection with one another through God. Like Samuel, we are able to discern the calling by which we will live and work for it. For individual Christians, we may also loosely go through the three stages in the relationship with God. Baptism as a presentation to God, discerning the calling and the faith journey as part of the living Temple of God. Under the COVID context, 'my Father's house' gives spiritual food for thoughts by which we will continually be shaped and reshaped. Also, it will make us see baptism or presentation to the Lord anew. Under what circumstances we are living in, worship, baptism and fellowship with other believers in Christ make us the church that is the body of Christ. May God help us dedicate ourselves to God and discern the calling daily, and live as the living Temple today and always. Amen.

¹² Ecclesia, Greek Ekklēsia, ("gathering of those summoned")