

Dear Friends, who have celebrated the birth of Christ,

We might wonder about the Old Testament event in front of us today. There are stories in the news about parents and children being separated. In the year 2000 there was big news story about a tug of war between the Cuban American relatives of Elian Gonzalez wanting to keep little Elian in the States verses sending him back to his father in Cuba. Elian's mother had died while fleeing on the high seas with Elian.

All this sensitivity about children being separated from their parents may color our view of Elkanah and Hannah leaving little Samuel at the temple at around five years old. However, one thing that makes the story in 1 Samuel different is that Hannah had promised the Lord that if she conceived a child, she would give him up to the Lord. It was the Lord's decision to allow this childless woman to become pregnant and provide a son to work in God's kingdom.

Fortunately, you and I are not confronted with such a situation, but what about sending your children off to study for the ministry? Or turning your young people over to the pastor every Monday night for Confirmation instruction. Or what about letting your husband or wife to go to church for a meeting, a project or some other work that needs to be done? Are we ready to let them go?

What about giving of yourself for work in the kingdom? Not all of us will study for full time ministry in the Kingdom of Christ, but we all have a role to play, a way to serve.

Do you like serving in Jesus' name? Do you feel you don't have gifts? Do you feel your time is up? We at times will struggle to serve. But, I have good news from 1 Samuel, **The Lord Blesses Us to Serve After Christmas.**

1. The Lord blessed Samuel to serve.

How do you feel about work? Sometimes when it comes to house chores, we wrinkle our nose. If we have a hard time finding a good paying job and we finally get one, we can feel very blessed. We need to look on service in God's kingdom as a blessing. The Lord blessed Samuel to serve.

A. The Lord enabled Samuel to serve in his church from a very young age.

1. (pic) He was not too young to be involved in worship and duties related to worship. They had the tabernacle or worship tent. He tended the fire from the seven branched candle that gave light to the Holy Place. He kept it burning. We can guess that he had other duties such fetching things for Eli and the priests that made their work easier. It was a good life.

2. He could not teach the word of God at this time, but one of his works would have been learning God's word. Later on he would serve as a prophet and he would preach and teach.

B. Jesus considered it a privilege to be in God's house and to serve.

1. (pic) In the Gospel reading Jesus was old enough to go up to Jerusalem to the Temple to worship and to study God's word during the festival. He was so intent on serving his heavenly Father during this time, that he was separated from his parents for a short time.

2. Jesus would spend many a Sabbath as an adult in reading in the synagogues and never got tired of serving his Father by teaching God's word.

3. Later he would serve in a way that Samuel or any of us could never serve. Because our service is flawed and tainted by sin, he served as the sacrifice for the sins of the world. In this way he was our priest and our sacrifice.

C. At Shepherd of the Valley God's people get to serve in different ways.

1. (pic) Years ago before the addition to the church was built, I used the church office for Confirmation classes. That meant that the young people had to take down and set up for class every time we met. These same young people often would take down or set up chairs and tables in church for special events. We have people all ages preparing the altar for worship, lighting the candles, ushering the people in and out, etc. To help out at church is a privilege that God gives. We can't do it forever, but we can do it while he gives us strength.

2. We all come to church to hear God's word. Not everyone gets to serve as a teacher, but we can pray for our pastors and Sunday school teachers. (Pic) We also have two members of our church who are studying for the ministry. We want to remember Dan and Joshua in our prayers and all their classmates and Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary as the fields are ripe for harvest the workers are few, very few.

2. The Lord equipped him to serve.

If a person is going to do a job, you need the right tools. (Leatherman

multi-tool) We see today that the Lord equips us. We have the tools to serve.
A. Samuel was equipped to serve.

1. Samuel didn't stay five very long and he certainly grew in stature. So we hear that each year Hannah made him a tunic. Eli and other priests would have seen to Samuel's training so that he could serve in the temple and later teach God's word. Everything was provided by the Lord God. his tunic, his training under his spiritual mentor, Eli.

2. Samuel may have worried about providing for his parents, especially as they got older. Eli prayed that Hannah would have more children. We are told in verse 21 that she had three more boys and two daughters. Samuel didn't have to worry. The Lord provided for his family while he served.

B. Jesus was equipped to serve as our Savior.

1. The heavenly Father saw to it that Mary and Joseph provided for Jesus in his early life. During his ministry he was supported by the gifts and generosity of various disciples. We see in the Gospel reading today that Jesus spent time in God's word where he was surrounded by the teachers of God's word. At age twelve he understands that he has come to serve as the Savior.

2. Jesus also had family responsibilities. We see at the cross that he does not worry about his mother's care, but turns her well-being over to his friend John. He does this trusting that his heavenly Father will make all things work for good.

C. The Lord equips us for service in the kingdom. There are various mentors, life experiences and acquired skills that are useful.

1. However, the most important tool for us to make use of in serving God is his Word in the Bible. First of all God's word prepares us. It reminds that grudging and grumbling service is sinful. It reminds us that Jesus took our sins away. Secondly, through the word he teaches us to witness, correct, encourage and train others. It is only when we keep God's word in mind that we can serve in the way he wants us to.

2. One thing that is require in serving is time. Family members and friends may not understand and even complain. We may be tempted not to serve as we should. We need pray for their benefit and we need understand that just Samuel's parents and Jesus' mother were provided for, so our Lord will take care of those whom we love and have responsibilities for.

3. The Lord blessed his service.

Are you one of those people who serves the Lord, but you feel like you don't see any results? Even Jesus speaking through the prophet Isaiah is concerned about the results of his ministry. He says in Isaiah 49, **"I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing at all."** (4) In the next words Jesus expresses his trust that his Father will work all things out. What we see with Samuel is that the Lord blessed his service.

A. Samuel had a successful ministry.

1. Samuel served as a prophet after the death of Eli. He was the spiritual leader of God's people, Israel. He served faithfully for many decades.
2. Israel was blessed under Samuel's guidance. There were people like Jesse, the father of King David who listened to the word of the Lord and prospered. Samuel served as a bridge from the era of the Judges to the era of Kings.

B. The service of Jesus was even more blessed.

1. His service means salvation for us. Jesus was perfect. (pic) Luke 2 says as much, **"He was obedient to them...and Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."** (51,52) His heavenly Father stated on two occasions that he was well pleased with him. St. Paul tells us in Romans 5:8 **"Through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous."** As the author of the letter to the Hebrews told us this morning, he was perfect in suffering and was the author of our salvation.
2. We fail sometimes give the service we should. We may wonder about our status as God's children. But since we have been justified through his life and death, we are saved and we are his children. Since this is true, we can serve.

C. The Lord wants us to understand that our service is fruitful.

1. At the beginning of December a group from church went to sing Christmas hymns and carols at the Chaparral Winds complex. The people seem to enjoy it. We go to the memory care unit in one of the buildings. People came from all over the unit and stood by us and sang and smiles as we sang of Jesus. It was a delight to see their joy and the fruit of our singing for our Lord.
2. The work that you and I do will not always show visible results. We need to trust Jesus' words in John 15 that those who are attached to him will bear fruit. In fact he says, "will bear MUCH fruit.", fruitful, happy lives.

Conclusion: The Lord blesses us to serve after Christmas! Amen.