

Year B, Proper 4
June 3, 2018
The Rev. Fred Devall

By now most of you have heard of the The Rev. Jesse Duplantis' claims that the Lord has instructed him to raise 54 million dollars to buy a new plane, specifically a brand new Dassault Falcon 7X, which would be the fourth plane in the fleet. Duplantis is absolutely certain that if Jesus was here today he would not be riding a donkey but would instead be jet-setting around the globe spreading the good news.

Well, I too have had a vision from the Lord to go every place that the Rev. Duplantis is unable to land his jet. To that end the Lord has instructed me to raise money to buy a new bay boat. Remember, bay boats don't pull themselves; so I will need a new truck too. Time to pony up people!

All kidding aside, Mr. Duplantis, who hails from nearby La Place, makes a mockery of God's communication and specifically of God's call to act. Consider the story of Samuel. Probably like many of you, this story caught hold of me as a child and has never quite let me go.

For starters, Samuel was a miracle baby. His father had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah was barren. Because of this Peninnah would irritate Hannah to no end. In her disparity, Hannah prays mightily to the Lord and she conceives and bears a son, Samuel. Hannah had promised the Lord that if she were granted a son that he would be dedicated to the Lord; so his apprenticeship in the Temple under the tutelage of Eli is a fulfillment of Hannah's promise.

Before we move on with the story of Samuel you should know that this story falls into a category called the Barren Woman motif. We saw the same story in Genesis with Abraham, Hagar, and Sarah, and also Isaac with Rebekah. We even see such an appearance in the New Testament with John the Baptist. The barren woman is a symbol of Israel, also an under-dog who can conceive only by the power of the Lord. Notice that God moves forward in salvation history with the lowly Israel and not the rich and powerful Egypt. Back to Samuel.

He famously misunderstands the origin of the one calling his name. After a couple of visits from Samuel, Eli perceives that it is the Lord calling Samuel and instructs him to listen by saying, "Speak, for your servant is listening".

Have you ever been curious as to why the Lord did not call his priest Eli? It would have made sense to go with these esteemed priest, a leader of Temple Worship. We know God did not work through Eli; it was because of his two sons, Hophni and Phineas. We learn this from the narrative, "Now the sons of Eli were scoundrels; they had no regard for the Lord or for the duties of the priests to the people. When anyone offered sacrifice, the priest's servant would come, while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand, and he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself...Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the Lord; for they treated the offerings of the Lord with contempt" (1 Samuel 2:12-17).

Their father Eli knew of their contemptuous sins but did not do enough to stop them; therefore, the Lord works around them through Samuel, whom all Israel came to know as a "trustworthy prophet of the Lord" (1 Samuel 3:20).

I have to admit that I got a good laugh out of old Jesse Duplantis when I heard the jet story, but the more I heard about it my humor turned to disappointment and then disgust, not only because he makes a mockery of God's call but the damage that is done to the people when the offerings of the Lord are treated with contempt. You and I understand that we have very little in common with preachers for profit like Jesse Duplantis, but to the unchurched person, someone who doesn't understand the breadth of Christianity, it makes no difference. In other words Jesse Duplantis' antics are hurtful to us here at St. Martin's Episcopal Church.

The way to counter such misappropriation is to be about something different than idolatry of money and status and get on with ministry in the name of Jesus. One way to do this is to go back to the prayer read for us at baptism (BCP, p. 308), asking God to lead us in the new life of grace.

Grace is God's unmerited blessing upon us. That currency is something different than cash for airplanes. When we live by grace we stop keeping score of who we have righted and who has wronged us. We let grudges go. We love unconditionally as God loves us. We pray for enemies instead of simply talking

badly about them. We ask for forgiveness for what we have done or left undone and we work mightily on behalf of the underdogs of the world, knowing that Jesus was not high above the grittiness of life but actively engaged in living on earth. When we do that, we gain the trust of the people, just as Samuel was viewed as being a trustworthy prophet of the Lord, and he managed to be faithful without a fleet of jets. *Amen.*