

TEXT: 1 Samuel 3:1-20

TOPIC: God calls Samuel and with help from Eli, Samuel responds; God has plans for both.

SUBJECT: We live into a positive butterfly effect when we apply knowing God is with us with knowing God.

TITLE: The Butterfly Effect

PRAYER

I am going to share something today that surprises even me every time I think about it.

As some of you might remember, 1 Samuel 3:1-11 is my call narrative. That's nothing new. What may be surprising is that I have a love-hate relationship with this passage.

I have a love-hate relationship with it because I can see how my prenatal nickname – Sam – nurtured behaviors in me as a youth and as an adult that were anything but true to my being. It wasn't until January 2019 that I started to understand that.

When Mom found out she was pregnant with me – after suffering a miscarriage between my birth and my next oldest brother's birth – she was so thrilled to be expecting one final child that she went to her dictionary of names, and came across the name "Sam," which in her dictionary meant "gift from God."

What I realized in January 2019 was that I'd carried negative feelings of not fitting in because of my "gift-from-God" designation, and that made me somewhat of a nomadic loner or a maverick – pick whichever word you want; it's part of my journey. Being a nomad or a maverick for me, is my lifetime paradox – my cross to bear – and with every paradox there is a butterfly effect that can either result in good things or bad things.

I can't help but wonder if Samuel didn't feel the same way. Did Hannah, his mother, consider him a gift from God and that's why she named her son Samuel? Did Hannah's dedication of her son to the temple and to Eli's care signify Samuel's abandonment, particularly since he didn't know God until God wouldn't give up calling him? Did Samuel feel like a loner or

a maverick or a nomad because he ended up being called on to do things that would make the ears of anyone who heard what he was doing tingle?

I can't help but wonder. But I can relate to Samuel's story and I can understand why I identify so strongly with this passage, and it makes sense why it's my call narrative. Just as Samuel had to hear God's voice a fourth time before he could recall, so did I. What I doubt Samuel understood because I know I didn't understand it, was how chaos isn't about chaos, but chaos is about how the butterfly effect was making tiny change in my life, and those tiny changes have had a big impact on me.

And that's just the thing. Every one of us has a call narrative. God has something in mind God wants every one of us to do. And we can have a love-hate relationship with that because sometimes paradoxes are made of how we hope our lives will end up having a positive butterfly effect on our families, our churches, our neighbors and friends, our community and our world. The tiny changes we let happen in our lives, play a significant role in how the butterfly effect works itself out.

For as long as I can remember, I've wanted changes in my life to have a positive butterfly effect on my family, friends, neighbors, community and our world. For as long as I can remember I've wanted to live a life that makes a positive difference on the lives around mine in spite of whatever chaos or calm the day might bring. I don't know how well I've done, so I'll let others evaluate that. I will only say it's taken this long to learn and understand this and what God wants done with it, and I'm sure there's more learning ahead because there always is.

The butterfly effect is experienced whenever people wrestle with the chaos of changing their lives. Such was the case when God called Samuel. When God called Samuel, God said that

Eli and his sons, Hophni and Phineas, had fleeced people who came to the temple to worship, so God was going to take care of them. Is it any wonder then, why God called Samuel? A boy's innocence would significantly change a system corrupted by greed. Such was the case when the ears of the Israelites tingled because the form of governance they used was unlike other nations that had kings, so they wanted a king, too. Samuel dealt with that by listening to God's instruction to anoint Saul the first king of Israel, but Saul wasn't healthy for the Israelites, so God instructed Samuel to find David and anoint him as Saul's successor, and from that point forward, Israel thrived.

Throughout Samuel's, Saul's, and David's lives, however, there were points where little things they did led either to positive butterfly effects, such as when David slew Goliath and scared the Philistine army into submission to negative butterfly effects, such as that whole thing with Bathsheba and David's murder of her husband, Uriah.

When it comes to listening for God's voice calling my name or your name or Samuel's or David's or whomever, a call is about opening yourself to experiencing the butterfly effect. What we do with it will either lead to positives or negatives because the butterfly effect can lead to large-scale and unpredictable changes down the road. One such example – and this is why it's termed the butterfly effect – is that the metaphor has to do with how a butterfly flapping its wings can influence the details of something as significant as a tornado or a hurricane.

Perhaps the secret to how we might use the butterfly effect is found in how Samuel approaches it. In today's reading, Samuel approaches it by listening to God. Even though he mistakes God's voice for Eli's three times initially, Samuel learns from Eli what to say if Samuel hears God call his name again. The paradox of God's call results in a positive butterfly effect for

Samuel because Samuel listens to what God is saying and telling him to do. When Samuel doesn't listen to God, you get the worst elements of Saul; when Samuel listens to God, you get the best aspects of David.

For Samuel the butterfly effect is positive when Samuel remembers that God is with him; God is not separate of him, but always with him. God is no more separate from Samuel as God is separate from us. God is always with us, always loving us, always accepting us, always calling us back to our true selves, and always awaiting our intention to walk with God. The butterfly effect God has in store for us is positive when we embrace that, like Samuel, we are never separated from God.

I don't know, but perhaps the positive side of the butterfly effect is about a love relationship between God and me. If that's the case I can certainly live with the way the butterfly effect touches my life and yours because it can always be a reminder that God never abandons anyone. Instead, God just waits for us to realize how paradoxes can bless us when we are willing to positively live into the butterfly effect.

In the name of the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God in perfect community. Amen.