

First Sunday after Christmas

THE GOOD LAD

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26

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Analysis by Marcus Felde

Samuel was ministering before the Lord, a boy wearing a linen ephod. 19His mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year, when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. 20Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, “May the Lord repay you with children by this woman for the gift that she made to the Lord”; and then they would return to their home.

26Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and with the people.

Preliminary note: I can't quite believe anyone would preach the OT lesson on this Sunday, with such an appealing narrative in the Gospel! Hence the brevity. I hope without sacrificing clarity.

DIAGNOSIS: Bad Boys

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : “Oh, boys will be boys!”

This little snippet of 1 Samuel needs its context, if we are to find diagnostic material. But it is implied in the first three words: “Samuel was ministering.” Why Samuel? Didn’t Eli have sons of his own to help out? Oh, they were busy with much

mischievous, we hear. Sleeping with various women at the very entrance to the tent of meeting. Had they no shame?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Chips off the old block?*

The diversions of Eli's sons were symptomatic of a deeper problem: the diversion of their hearts from following and worshipping God. No, in this they were not imitating faithful father Eli, although his blind eye towards their misconduct was itself a failing. It seems Israel had been depending on heredity ("We are sons of Abraham," or is that, "We are sons of Eli"?) instead of its heritage of promises for its solid link with God. Not reliable!

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Dying the same day*

As a signal to Eli that God was finished with his line, Eli was told that his sons Hophni and Phinehas would die on the same day. The line was going to be cut off (vv. 31-34). (Boys will be . . . gone.)

PROGNOSIS: Good Lad

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Rendered to God*

Samuel, on the other hand, is a type for Christ in the fact that he was given by his mother to God in thanksgiving for God's goodness to her in saving her from childlessness (which corresponds to the de facto childlessness of Eli, and the death of his line). Samuel is not a sacrifice for all of us, of course. But Jesus Christ was given for all of us, to give us all life. He serves in a different sort of temple than Samuel did-Jesus' is God's true temple-. And while Samuel made intercession for the people, Jesus gave himself to God as intercession for the people-that is, us. And he is the only intercessor, the Promised One, whom we need.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Prodigy of*

Faith

Samuel's service before the Lord models perfect faith. He is presumably playing a role ordinarily reserved for people who are more obviously qualified, because they are older and wiser. Yet he is the one who listens to the Lord, and who speaks truly what the Lord tells him to speak. While it might be his good performance that qualifies him for the favor of people, it is certainly only his faith that helps him grow in favor with God. So it is for us: Faith alone enables us to grow in God's favor.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Little Robes*

Hannah brings Samuel a little robe each year, as she lives out her continued thanksgiving to God for the gift of her firstborn. The "little robes" we "bring to the temple," the duties we perform for others in which we delight, are expressions of our gratitude to God for the Promise kept.