

The calling

Gillian Cooper *reflects on* 1 Samuel 3:1-10 [11-20] and John 1:43-51

Samuel is a key figure in the Old Testament story. A prophet and politician, he selects, on God's behalf, Israel's first two kings, and so sets the stage for everything that follows.

Today we meet him as a boy. His life already dedicated to God, he lives in the shrine at Shiloh, apprenticed to the priest Eli. As a voice wakes him in the night, he has a taste of the magnitude of the task ahead of him. The message he receives from God is not one of love or encouragement. It is a message of judgement on Eli and his sons, a message that Samuel has to convey. He will spend the rest of his life listening

to the voice of God and conveying unwelcome truths to people in power. Even after his death, Samuel will be called to speak unpalatable truth. This time the calling voice will be that of King Saul, Israel's first, inadequate king, and Samuel will speak to him, as ever, of defeat and death.

Like Samuel, Jesus' first disciples answer the call, not knowing what difficult and dangerous tasks may lie ahead. Like Samuel they recognise the divine voice that speaks the ultimate truth and know that it is worth following into the unknown. 🙏

Give us wisdom, Lord, to hear you when you call and courage to respond; that we may give ourselves to the service of your truth whatever the cost, always trusting in your power to save. Amen.

Hannah presenting Samuel to Eli. Basilica of St Vitus, Ellwangen, Germany. Zvonimir Athletic / Shutterstock.com



Finding God on the smallholding

by Jeni Parsons

It's dark in the evenings and dark in the mornings on the smallholding, and in the evening I feed the animals early before dark. It's also wet, foggy and cold quite often when I'm outside wearing lots of layers, boots, hat and gloves. The sheep, pigs and poultry have ways of coping with it all, the bees are

asleep, the polytunnel is mostly dormant apart from the cabbage family which we eat almost every day. There is plenty of work still to be done – firewood to collect, chop, carry. It's a time for repairs to fencing and shed roofs. It's a time for cleaning and clearing, for pruning and mulching. And in the midst of these tasks it's a time for dreaming, planning, hoping, longing. I wonder what God dreamed during the long days of creating? I want to be a part of that dream, to create alongside the One who created me. 🙏

“**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.**”

Proverbs 1:7

New Year resolutions

A change of heart

by Barbara Mosse

Zacchaeus' story in Luke 19 says he was a rich tax collector from Jericho. When Jesus visited the city, Zacchaeus was keen to see him, but because of the crowds and his short stature the only way he could manage it was to climb a tree. He must have been surprised and humbled when Jesus singled him out and

invited himself to Zacchaeus' house, and the effect this had on him was profound.

There had been much wrong in Zacchaeus' life to this point, as his promise to Jesus makes clear – “if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much”. But Zacchaeus didn't hide away. And neither should we; whatever behaviour we may regret in our past, Jesus addresses us, as he did Zacchaeus. Insert your own name: “_____, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” 🙏