



**breadfortheworld**  
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

## January 15, 2012 Second Sunday after the Epiphany

*By Lincoln E. Galloway*

1 Samuel 3:1–10 (11–20)

Psalm 139:1–6, 13–18

1 Corinthians 6:12–20

John 1:43–51

### Introduction

Today's texts invite faithful listening to God, whose all-encompassing knowledge cannot be fathomed. The texts encourage us to speak truth to power through trust in God, as well as to show proper reverence to our bodies, to engage in the unrelenting search for truth and revelation, and to respond with committed witness.

### 1 Samuel 3:1–10 (11–20)

This text provides us with a glimpse of a new beginning, even a new era. Samuel represents hope for a religious landscape bereft of any sign of spiritual vitality. "The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread" (v. 1). The old, depleted era is represented by Eli, whose "eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see" (v. 2). Samuel, however, is surrounded by symbols of divine presence; "the lamp of God had not yet gone out," and Samuel's place of rest was in the temple, "where the ark of God was" (v. 3). Samuel seems to be well positioned to hear the voice, to see the work, and to experience the presence of God.

Yet Samuel does not come to this moment alone. He stands on his mother's prayers, vows, and confidence in God, who exalts and brings low, and who "raises up the poor from the dust" (2:1, 7–8). He stands on the faithful actions of his parents (1:28; 2:11; 3:1), and with each passing year (2:18–19) he grows "both in stature and in favor with [God] and with the people" (2:26). Samuel's prophetic work and understanding are quite likely influenced by parents who witness faithfully to a God whose justice embraces the poor. It may also be that our responsiveness to issues of justice is cultivated by the stories, cries, and prayers of those who shape our lives.

In the first part of the chapter, Samuel hears the voice of God call to him in the night (vv. 1–10). This is a new beginning for Samuel, since the word of God had not yet been revealed to him (v. 7). In the second part (vv. 11–20) Samuel understands that in his ministry he must not only listen, but speak. In both of these assignments, Eli the priest gives him direction and encouragement to prepare him for listening (v. 9) and to speak truthfully and courageously the message from God (vv. 15–17). Finally, Eli affirms that the word of God has indeed been revealed to Samuel (v. 18). Samuel continues to mature and grow in his speaking ministry (v. 19) until he is established as a trustworthy prophet in all of Israel (3:20; 4:1). Samuel's ministry unfolds in the context of family, he grows in favor with people (2:26), he is guided by a priest. He learns that justice is the prayer and the faithful work of a community. He learns how to be open to instruction. He accepts that a



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prophetic ministry that proclaims truth, even to religious or political powers, must be anchored in a life of devotion and fidelity to God's call to listen and to speak, because, ultimately, the work of justice is initiated and supported by God. This was the case of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who, whether in silent reflection in jail or soaring oratory in the nation's capital, interpreted his life's work as that of a drum major of justice, peace, and righteousness. As we receive affirmation for our prophetic ministry from family or faith community, we proclaim with assurance that God is with us and will not let our "words fall to the ground" (v. 19).