**Ready to Respond**

St Augustine of Canterbury and Samuel and Jesus-1 Sam. 3:1-21andLk. 2: 22-35

  We're at the last in our series of **'Ready to Respond'** , which shows parallels between the responses to God of various figures in Scripture and that of later believers. Today, we will look at Samuel, Jesus and St Augustine of Canterbury, who brought Christianity from Rome into Britain. Each was called by God for a difficult, even dangerous, task which they fulfilled.

                As a child, I often found, especially when staying with my grandmother, that at a critical and crucial moment of whatever I was playing at the call would come-*"Lunch time-wash your hands and come in*". In some ways, this would be a pleasure and a good thing, for I might be hungry, but there was frequently a *'sting in the tail*.' So often, the second course would be semolina - my least favourite choice! My grandmother, as she stirred it in a double boiler on the Aga, would cry "I'm making the 'marvellous pudding' "  I could never decide whether this was an early form of 'spin' or whether she really believed what she was saying! This is a trivial example of the process, which the three people we are considering today exemplify. First, the call to something that could be good and wonderful, then the **'sting in the tail'.** which they overcame- triumphantly fulfilling their call.

      Samuel at night heard and eventually (helped by Eli) recognised God's call. As 1 Sam. 1 : 1 makes clear this was highly unusual for 'In those days word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.' When, at Eli's suggestion, on the third occasion when Samuel heard his name, he said *'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening'* v. 10, little did he realise the wonderful ministry on which he was being led. 'The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up and He let none of his words fall to the ground' v. 19. Indeed, ultimately all Israel *'recognised that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord*’ and at Shiloh 'He revealed himself to Samuel through His word.' v 20.

      Yet there was a 'sting in the tail' when God first spoke to Samuel. He told him of the judgement to come on Eli and his family. As a father Eli had failed to discipline his sons and the Lord had warned him in chapter 2 that his sons would die on the same day and that He would raise up a replacement but *'faithful priest.'* Samuel did not realise this, so he was very reluctant, next morning, to tell Eli the grim news for him and his family that would set all Israel by the ears! At Eli's insistence, Samuel, bravely, told him all he had heard. Eli's response was not one of anger, as Samuel had feared, but one of faithful acceptance of the Lord's sovereignty. Samuel had learned how to listen to the Lord and in His strength to proclaim His will regardless of the consequences.

          In the episode of Jesus' presentation in the Temple by his parents, Luke shows how a regular Jewish ritual of redeeming with a sacrifice the first born male from being given to the Lord was transformed with a prophecy from Simeon of a wonderful role for Jesus. He had been promised by the Holy Spirit that *'he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ'* Lk. 2: 26 &, moreover has moved by the Spirit to go into the Temple courts where he met Mary, Joseph and Jesus. He explained that Jesus would be the Saviour, 'prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.' Lk. 2: 31-32. What a tremendous future for the young child-how wonderful to be the Lord's Messiah.

        Yet there was a 'sting in the tail', for the Child would divide Israel into those who believed in Him and those who did not. Thus, He would be very unpopular and hated by many, who would be outraged that He could and would reveal the *'thoughts of many hearts.'* This was a grim prospect, even if He was enabled by God and was following His will. For Mary, of course, there would be heart break, anguish and great sorrow to see Jesus reviled and crucified. As Simeon says in v. 35 'And a sword will pierce your own soul too.' Mary kept all these things in her heart, was steadfast & supportive. Jesus, the Christ, was raised from the dead, ascended & glorified, as He followed his Father's will.

       Lastly, St Augustine, a more shadowy figure, who was, probably, born in the early 6th century in Italy to a reasonably well off family. He became a Benedictine monk, was well educated (according to one of Pope Gregory the Great's letters he had a good knowledge of the Bible),and was Prior (second in command) of St Andrew's monastery in Rome, whose Abbot was the busy Pope Gregory. This suggests the Pope knew he was an efficient administrator and leader.

    Bede recounts the tale (perhaps apocryphal) that in 595 the Pope saw some fair haired slaves from Britain in Rome and on being told they were Angles said they should be Angels, which led him to send a mission to Britain. There were, probably, other reasons-the Celtic missionaries were hard at work in Europe-aggressive pagans were seeping in as well.  Augustine was called to lead the group of 40, some of whom were monks, to the kingdom of Kent whose queen Bertha, a Frankish princess, was a Christian.The prospect of bringing Jesus Christ to this benighted island was wonderful.

    Yet, the 'sting in the tail' was the objective. The journey to Kent was long, arduous and difficult - Britain was thought of as a land of primitives, fogs and foreign languages - their reception in Kent might be uncertain. Consequently, after awhile they sent back a request to call the whole thing off - the Pope refused, sent successful messages to various Frankish kings to help them with interpreters and general support, while encouraging them to go on. They arrived in 597, were warmly greeted by King A Ethelberht and his Queen, given land for an Abbey and successfully led many to baptism, including the King. Augustine died in 604. He had brought Kent into communion with Rome, was made Archbishop of Canterbury ( Gregory's idea of his moving to London failed), but never made much headway with the Christians in the rest of Britain, some of whom had endured after the Romans' departure and looked to the Celtic church in Ireland for help.

Nonetheless, Augustine had fulfilled his mission, despite the obstacles, and was considered *'the Apostle of the English.'*

    What can we learn from these three? Perhaps, we need (and I say this as much to myself as anyone else) to be more alert to the Lord's call and to follow it. In Scripture, the call is often linked to promises of help and a splendid realisation of the Lord's will. In these troublous times this may be a message for us.