

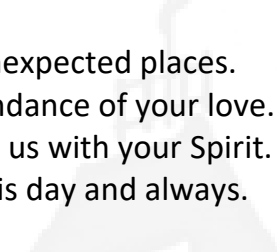
## Children's Sunday 2024

June 2, 2024 at First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, UCC

Sarah Higginbotham

*Texts: 1 Samuel 3: 1-10*

### Bible 101 Play Intro



L: Let us pray.  
Living God, you meet us in unexpected places.  
and surprise us with the abundance of your love.  
Feed us by your Word and fill us with your Spirit.  
so that we may follow you this day and always.  
In Jesus' name, Amen.

A reading from I Samuel, chapter 3:

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to God under Eli. The word of God was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was.

Then God called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. God called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know God, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. God called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that God was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.' "

So Samuel went and lay down in his place. Now God came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." I love this story. At our first Bible 101 class this year, when we went around the room to name a story we remembered, or particularly like, from anywhere in the Bible, I chose this one. So, I had a pleasant moment of surprise a couple of weeks ago when I went to the Revised Common Lectionary for this Sunday and found it listed as the First Reading!

There are a few things I love about this story:

First, it's quite dramatic. It takes place at night, crossing the line between wakefulness and sleep. That liminal space is often ripe with creativity, wonder, and new insights. How many of you have had a thought right before falling asleep or right when you wake, causing you to reach for a pen or your phone to write it down?

Second, it follows a pattern that's familiar in folk and fairy tales: something happens once, twice, and then a third time; and it's only on the third try that the characters get it right and the story resolves. Think: Goldilocks and the Three Bears or the Three Billy Goats Gruff or the Three Little Pigs. In fact, scholars of folklore sometimes call this "the power of three"\* or "the rule of three,"\*\* and you can find it used in all kinds of storytelling, including some of the most entertaining jokes we tell that endure for generations.

But the **third** thing I love about this story might be the most meaningful to me (*see what I did there?*). Samuel is a boy. He's not quite an adolescent, more like a tween, somewhere around 10, 11, or 12 years old - like our Bible 101 students. He's apprenticed to Eli, a wise old man, who has had moments in his life when "he's come very close to God and God has come very close to him," language we hear in many of our Godly Play stories. This time, though, it's Samuel, not Eli, who is coming close to God. But this is new for Samuel, and, using logic from his own life experience, he comes to the wrong conclusion, attributing the voice to Eli, his teacher. He wakes up Eli, who brushes him off, not understanding what is happening. Samuel approaches Eli twice, and Eli dismisses him twice, before he stops and really pays attention to what is going on. It takes three tries by God and by Samuel before Eli gets it!

I wonder if any of you grown-ups out there who have cared for children over the years have ever found yourselves in Eli's position? Have you ever had a child come to you with a question or a thought or a request, and you've brushed it off? Maybe you were in the middle of something and didn't have time to engage. Maybe you were dead asleep when the child came to you, and you couldn't quite get your head in gear to respond, other than to pick them up and put them back in bed, saying, "go back to sleep, we'll talk in the morning." Anyone? Me, too!

But if that child persisted, doing whatever it took to get your attention, did your response ever change when you really listened? This is the part that resonates with me. In my many years of working with kids and raising my own kid, it's happened more times than I want to admit. And when I have stopped rushing or sleeping or thinking about

other things, and crouched down to be at eye level, to take in what I am being offered, it's usually been worth it. Small humans often have something important to say, and it's up to us to really listen.

So now it's time to listen to our Bible 101 students. These 6th and 7th graders have spent the last two years of Church School learning many things about the Bible, and now it's time for them to share their Gospel Play with us. And if you pay attention, you may hear them reveal a bit about themselves and about each other, bringing us all a little closer to God in this community of faith. Let's listen...

\*<https://fairytalez.com/blog/the-power-of-three-why-fairy-tales-often-feature-a-triple/>  
\*\*[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rule\\_of\\_three\\_\(writing\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rule_of_three_(writing))

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## Who Is Jesus?

First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, UCC

## Bible 101 Gospel Play

June 2, 2024

### Cast of Characters:

<b>Narrators</b>	Lorraine and Georgia
<b>Luke</b>	Lindalee
<b>Matthew</b>	Ben
<b>Mark</b>	Kiran
<b>John</b>	John

### **John [walking over to Kiran]**

If I were writing a gospel about Kiran, I'd be sure to include stories about playing basketball, having fun in the city, and hanging out with friends. Spending time with people and pets that he loves is very important to Kiran.

### **Kiran**

If I were writing a gospel about John, I'd definitely talk about soccer, his favorite activity! I'd also mention hiking, cubing, playing the piano, and watching professional sports. Staying active and connected to others is very important to John.

**Lindalee [walking over to Georgia]**

If I were writing a gospel about Georgia, I'd be sure to talk about painting. I'd also talk about spending time on Block Island and time with family. Georgia really enjoys being creative and sharing her time with people she loves.

**Georgia**

If I were writing a gospel about Lindalee, I'd be sure to talk about how she enjoys dancing, singing, and shopping! Spending time with family is also really important to Lindalee.

**Ben [walking over to Lorraine]**

If I were writing a gospel about Lorraine, I'd be sure to talk about playing the violin and eating ice cream. Music is a very important part of Lorraine's life.

**Lorraine**

If I were writing a gospel about Ben, I would make sure to describe the thrill of moving fast, like on a go-kart or bicycle. Ben enjoys racing with others who have a competitive spirit. Engaging with his quick and creative mind is also important to Ben.

*[Students walk to the table, put on name hats, return to previous places, except Lorraine & LindaLee switch places.]*

**Lorraine/Narrator**

When Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote gospels about Jesus, they included stories that they wanted us to remember, stories they believed would tell us something important about who Jesus is.

**Georgia/Narrator**

When Luke told stories about Jesus, he made sure to show how Jesus welcomed all people—even children, even women, even tax collectors and sinners.

*[Lindalee/Luke opens her arms wide.]*

**Lorraine/Narrator**

When Matthew wrote his gospel about Jesus, he told stories about Jesus's Jewish background and identity. He often used passages from the Old Testament to describe Jesus and his ministry. Showing Jesus's closeness to Judaism was really important to Matthew.

*[Ben/Matthew looks through a Bible.]*

**Georgia/Narrator**

When Mark wrote his gospel about Jesus, he thought it was important to include stories about how Jesus challenged the status quo. He even went into the Temple and turned over the tables of the moneychangers! That made people mad.

*[Kiran/Mark lifts his fist as if at a protest.]*

**Lorraine/Narrator**

John thought it was important to show that Jesus was the Word of God. John uses lots of symbols to describe Jesus—bread, water, light, life, word, shepherd, door way.

*[John/John holds up his sign.]*

**Georgia/Narrator**

Of course, the gospels don't always agree on what stories about Jesus are most important...

**Lorraine/Narrator**

They sure don't. Oh look, they're arguing again!

**Luke/Lindalee**

The angel of the Lord appeared to Mary!

**Matthew/Ben**

Wait a minute! The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, in a dream!

**Luke/Lindalee**

Jesus was born in a barn, a lowly stable.

**Matthew/Ben**

A barn? You talkin' cows and chickens? Jesus descended straight from King David!

**Luke/Lindalee**

Shepherds came to visit him when he was a baby!

**Matthew/Ben**

Shepherds? It was wise men from the east!

**Lorraine/Narrator**

Break it up! Break it up!

**Mark/Kiran**

Who cares where he was born? Jesus came to tell us that the kingdom of heaven was very near!

**John/John**

Gentlemen, gentlemen. There is no need to squabble over details. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

**Matthew/Ben, Mark/Kiran, Luke/Lindalee**

What's he talking about??

**Luke/Lindalee**

You lost me at "Gentlemen, Gentlemen."

**Matthew/Ben** *[to the congregation]*

John likes to get a little philosophical.

**Mark/Kiran**

Yeah, he loves to show off that Greek education!

**Luke/Lindalee**

But his gospel is very beautiful, you must admit.

**ALL**

*[Murmur of agreement.]*

**Matthew/Ben**

And he does know stories about Jesus that none of us knew.

**ALL**

*[Murmur of agreement.]*

**Lorraine/Narrator**

Sometimes, though, the gospel writers agree with each other.

**Gospel Writers** *[looking at each other in surprise]*

*We do?*

**Georgia/Narrator**

Yes, sometimes you all tell the same story almost exactly the same way.

**Gospel Writers** *[looking at each other in surprise]*  
We do?

**Lorraine/Narrator**

Yes! Remember the story of when Jesus fed five thousand people with only five loaves and two fishes?

**Georgia/Narrator**

Remember how everyone ate until they were satisfied? Remember how the disciples collected 12 baskets of leftovers?

**Luke/Lindalee**

Yes, that's right. There were five thousand people.

**Matthew/Ben**

And only five loaves and two fish.

**Mark/Kiran**

But when everyone had eaten their fill, there were 12 baskets left over.

**John/John**

Jesus told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments so that nothing may be lost!"

**Georgia/Narrator**

That's what the gospel writers did, too. They gathered up the fragments of Jesus's life and ministry, so that nothing would be lost.

**Lorraine/Narrator**

And they passed their baskets of stories down to us. We share them so that we can remember who Jesus is.

*[Everyone takes off hats.]*

**John**

I remember Jesus. I remember that he said, "the last shall be first, and the first shall be last."

**Kiran**

I remember Jesus. I remember how he taught love.

**Ben**

I remember Jesus. I remember that he performed miracles.

**Georgia**

I remember Jesus. I remember how he welcomed all people.

**Lindalee**

I remember Jesus. I remember that he died on a cross for us.

**Lorraine**

I remember Jesus. I remember that he healed the sick and told everyone how to be good.

**ALL**

How do YOU remember Jesus? Who is Jesus for YOU?

**THE END**

