

“Has the Lamp Burned Out?”

Psalm 139
1 Samuel 3:1-21

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In the German film *Das Fraulein*, Ruza is a fifty something, never married, café owner whose life consists solely of routine and order. She never smiles, never talks to anyone beyond what is necessary to run her business. She left her homeland of Yugoslavia as a young woman in hopes of a better life. But ultimately she sacrificed all her relationships for work. It seemed any hope for change was gone like a lamp that has been allowed to burned out.

Ana is 20 something, impulsive, she has also left what used to be Yugoslavia, her family was killed from the Bosnian siege, and is secretly of leukemia.

As the story unfolds, Ruza hires Ana (who was not really even looking for work) at the café and the story of transformation begins. Ana, though secretly dying, lives life to the fullest and her spirit is infectious to the other employees, but Ruza remains unchanged. But Ana finds out that it is Ruza’s birthday and decides to throw her a party against the fearful advice of the other employees. They surprise Ruza with a festive gathering, with music and drink from their homeland. Ana has everyone dancing, but not Ruza, she has left all that behind. Ana literally pulls Ruza to the dance floor and begins to dance with her. And you can see the young woman who left her homeland so many years ago begin to emerge. Perhaps the lamp had not yet gone out.

They become friends, but when Ruza discovers that Ana is dying she becomes more than her friend, she becomes her mother. But after some medical care, Ana leaves as quickly as she came. But she leaves Ruza forever changed. The dying young woman taught the lifeless older woman how to live.

Eli was on his last legs. He had been a priest and judge of Israel for almost 40 years. His eyesight had almost gone. His life was growing dim. He had not heard from the Lord in years, perhaps he was gone. What good is a priest without God? He had no purpose. It seemed the lamp had gone out for his life.

But like Ruza, a young life entered the scene. That Samuel existed was the answer to a desperate prayer by his mother who was made to feel useless by her husband and his other more productive wives. Hannah promised that if God gave her a son, she would dedicate him to God. Eli overheard this prayer prayed in the temple. And so Samuel was given over to Eli, God’s representative, in order to serve.

Certainly Eli never expected to be raising a child in his old age. His life was set. It wasn’t much of a life, but he had his routine and now he would have to deal with a noisy ,messy kid. What was God doing to him? Couldn’t he just let him have his final years in peace? Just let that lamp burn out and be done with it.

But that's not how God works. God calls us in every stage of life to a purpose. And Eli, in his final stage learned that lesson from a boy in his first stage of service. Young Samuel heard God's voice, but he didn't know it was God's voice. However, while Eli no longer seemed to hear God's voice, he had the experience to know that Samuel was being called by God. He was able to do with Samuel what he neglected to do with his own sons, hear God's voice. The lamp was not yet out in Samuel. He still had life. He still had a purpose.

I have never been a believer of the phrase, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks." I have known plenty of "old dogs" who learned more later in life than they ever did while their life was mired by long work hours. In my experience in church, all kinds of wonderful things have been brought about by our senior members. It's never too late for a new life.

Many of you recommended that I watch the movie "The Bucket List". Two men, one rich, one poor, one black, one white, one in a long time marriage, one divorced several times, both dying of cancer. They decide they will put together a list of all the things they want to do before they die. Everything from skydiving to climbing Mt. Everest to seeing something truly grand. In doing these things, they each are changed. One reconnects with his estranged daughter, one rediscovers the passion in his marriage. They both discovered how to live, rather than simply awaiting death. They needed each other to do it.

Ruza and Ana needed each other. Eli and Samuel needed each other. God did not create us to live in solitary confinement. God creates us for each other. He uses us for each other to bring new life. For transformation. For love. And often the most unlikely people that God brings into our lives have the greatest impact.

We are not told exactly what Samuel meant to old Eli, but perhaps he was the answer to a desperate prayer to hear God again. He heard him through a boy and perhaps rediscovered that God had never left him...that the same God who knit him together in his mother's womb, was also always behind him and before him, his hand was always upon him, who even to the end is even still with him.

This same God is calling to you in the night. He will bring the people into your life from whom you need to receive new life. Take them seriously. Be open to receiving them, even the people you least expect. And perhaps you will be the person deliver new life to someone else who it seems the lamp has gone out. Share the fire from your lamp that the lamp of others will be relit.

If you are hearing these words, it's not too late...Open up your life to God's transformational power and receive the breath of life, like fresh oxygen to a flickering flame.