

Scripture and Sermon for Sunday, January 18, 2015

1 Samuel 3:1-10 [11-20]

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord 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 the Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. The Lord 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 the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord 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 the Lord 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 the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Then the Lord said to Samuel, "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle. On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering forever." Samuel lay there until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." He said, "Here I am." Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and

more also, if you hide anything from me of all that he told you." So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. Then he said, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him."

As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord.

This is the Word of the Lord: thanks be to God!

John 1:43-51

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Let us pray...Amen.

This morning's Hebrew Scripture tells the story of how the prophet Samuel was called by God. Called by name, and called into service beyond what he was already doing. In fact, Samuel first responsibility was to tell Eli, his boss, a difficult truth: that Eli's dynasty would be destroyed because of his son's wicked behavior.

Our Christian Scripture tells the story of Jesus, calling Philip and Nathanael. Both end up following Jesus, though Nathanael takes a little convincing. Philip follows Jesus right away, and takes Jesus to Nathanael. Nathanael's response to Philip's news of having found the Messiah is 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?'. A tough sell, but Jesus convinces Nathanael to join him by saying that he had seen Nathanael under a fig tree.

Now, together, or alone, both of these 'Call Stories' have value to us as God's faithful children. At the very least, these stories have historical value, to the extent that we can trust them as history. But where they become really important is when we try and see ourselves in them. Where they can really have an impact is when we ask ourselves, what is God calling us to do, and, what does Jesus see us doing before he calls us?

Here we are, going about our business, doing the things we do every day. And when a crisis comes up, we think we should pray to God for a resolution. Or for comfort. Or for whatever it is we think will make the situation better. We pray, maybe here in church, maybe in private, and then we wait for an answer. Does this sound familiar?

But the Samuel story reminds us that God is calling us even as we are going about our daily lives, only we don't hear, or we don't understand that it's God who is calling us. We're too busy listening for what we want to hear. The answer to our prayers. We certainly don't want to hear that we're being called to serve the Lord, to serve others, and most of us aren't equipped to tell the people close to us inconvenient and painful truths.

And if we put ourselves in Nathanael's position, we go about our business, thinking God and Jesus can't see us. That we're somehow hiding from God as we go about our lives. So we're a bit shocked when we're confronted with the truth that we are completely visible to Jesus, and to God, in all of our human glory, faults and all. Under the fig tree, so to speak, with nowhere to hide. Jesus already knows what we think, what we feel, what we intend to do next. Jesus already knows where we fall short, where we fail, and where we need to grow. *And he loves us anyway! And he calls us anyway!*

In these days, the Word of the Lord is rare, and visions are not widespread. And even as God calls the faithful to ever deeper service, fewer and fewer hear the call, and even fewer still answer the call.

The inconvenient truth for us is that God calls us into service, even as we are serving in the way we think is best. We either don't hear God's call, or we mistake it for someone or something else, like Samuel did. The only difference is we don't have someone like Eli to help us understand that it's God's voice calling. Well, we do, we actually have the Eli of our Hebrew Scripture, telling us right now, today, that it's God's voice calling us. Telling us to answer, 'speak Lord, for your servant is listening'. If we could put aside the list of things we've prayed for, the things we want answered by God, we just might hear God's voice calling us by name.

Jesus calls us into service, like he did with Philip and Nathanael. Some of us will respond like Philip, and follow immediately, but most of us will resist, like Nathanael. Only instead of casting aspersions on the one who comes from Nazareth, we'll say, 'Can anything good come out of us?'

The inconvenient truth is that some very good things can come from us. Jesus sees us as we are, fully human, fully fallible, mistakes and wrong turns, misunderstandings and disobedience....and he calls us anyway.

He needs us. To be his servants. To be his hands, and voice, and eyes and ears. He needs us to follow him on the faithful path.

It can be a bit disturbing to realize that God is continually calling us, and we're not answering. It can be very disturbing to realize that Jesus is calling us, in spite of our flaws. But such is the challenge when we choose the Christian life. Or when the Christian life chooses us.

So what are we to do? How are we to receive this 'good news'?

We might start by listening differently. We might start by putting aside our petitions and our requests, and simply tell God, 'speak, for your servant is listening'.

We might start by trying to see ourselves as Jesus sees us: as valuable allies for peace, and love, and forgiveness in the world. As worthy helpers in the effort to make the world a better place. And in those efforts, our shortcomings and our mistakes don't have any relevance: we can truly begin again every time we interact with another of God's children. We can be ambassadors of peace and love and forgiveness each and every moment we are alive.

Jesus sees us under the fig tree. God calls us to serve even now, when we think we are already serving. Jesus calls us to follow, even if we think we are unworthy of serving, ill-equipped to do his bidding.

I would like to challenge all of us in the week ahead to set aside some quiet time for reflective listening, to open up a space in our hearts for God to speak. For the Word of the Lord is rare these days, and visions are not widespread. But God calls us nonetheless. Jesus sees us nonetheless. We are called, and we are seen, even when we think we hear nothing, and think we can't be seen.

Many of you have heard my story, where my call came in the midst of my serving the developmentally disabled as an administrator. I misunderstood my call early on, preferring to do what I thought God wanted me to do, instead of doing what God was calling me to do. And there is a difference.

It's just that we need to listen for God's voice in the chaos of our lives, in the midst of our struggles and sometimes suffering, in the middle of living

our lives. But that's risky, isn't it? Because it might mean we have to make changes in order to follow.

God calls us, Jesus calls us, and sees us as we really are: partners in their ministry of peace, love and forgiveness. Listen. You can almost hear their voices...Amen.