

John 1:43-51

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵Philip 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." ⁴⁶Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸Nathanael asked him, "Where did you come to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." ⁴⁹Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹And 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."

1 Samuel 3:1-11

¹Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

²At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³the 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. ⁴Then the Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" ⁵and 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. ⁶The 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." ⁷Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸The 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. ⁹Therefore 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.

¹⁰Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." ¹¹Then 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.

I'm Listening January 14, 2018

There is an old, old story of a man who kept falling asleep during the sermon. His pastor was getting frustrated and, one Sunday decided to teach the man a lesson. As was his practice, he started to preach slowly, almost in a monotone -- sure enough, the man soon fell into a deep sleep. The pastor then said to the congregation, "Everyone who wants to go to heaven, stand up." Everyone stood ... except, of course, the man who was fast asleep.

The pastor had everyone sit down. Then he gently said, "Everyone who wants to go to hell," and with a bang on the pulpit and a rise in his voice said, "stand up!"

The sleeping man snorted awake and jumped to his feet as everyone around started to snicker. The man looked at all the people sitting around him, then looked at the pastor and said, "Preacher, I don't know what we're votin' on. But it looks like you and I are the only ones who are for it."

Sometimes it can be dangerous to fall asleep in church I guess. But that is precisely what Samuel was doing though perhaps with a different outcome than the sleeping parishioner. I don't know if you've ever been woken in the middle of the night, but it can be quite alarming, can't it? I can certainly remember a few times when I bolted right up in bed because I heard someone call my name. I know it must have been a dream and dreams often wake us, but still, I wonder if there really had been a voice.

And of course, there are always those times when a child cries or an unusual sound is heard, or the cat is pushing something off the dresser or there is a calf about to be born. But can you imagine hearing God call you in the night? Maybe some of you have experienced that. Both of our stories today are calling stories. And I can't help but wonder what your response would be if God called you as he called Samuel or as Jesus called his disciples. Would you be able to hear it? would you be willing to listen? Is there so much noise in your life that you wouldn't hear God call you?

I was reading last week in the book of 1 Kings chapter 19, where Elijah, another prophet, was hiding from his enemies when God called him up to the mountaintop. Well, it goes like this...He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks into pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind, an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire, a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here Elijah?"

The sound of sheer silence. I think I know what that sounds like. That is what Elijah heard. Silence. Sheer Silence. And in that Silence, God speaks. And then we answer.

What if God were to call you by name? How would that feel? What difference would that make? And what if God were to say, "You're the one. You're the one that I need to do what I'm calling you to do."

Now Samuel hears his name called three times in the night before he finally realizes that it is God who is calling. The fourth time God calls his name, he answers and listens to what God has to say.

As we worship today, I invite you to think about how God might be calling your name. And what your response might be. And I would like to just take you on a little bit of a guided meditation so that perhaps in this sacred place, this place that can also bring sheer silence, perhaps you might hear God speak to you. And then you can speak to God as well.

I invite everyone to close their eyes now and get comfortable. If you fall asleep remember our first story. I'm going to prompt you by asking you to imagine God is calling your name and then you may respond silently by saying, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." And then I'll ask you to listen for something specific. This is an inner conversation and meant to be between you and God. Not something you have to share with anyone. Ok?

I'll leave some silence in between each call.

❖ Imagine that God is calling your name.

"Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

Wait... Listen... What do you think God wants to say to you? (30 seconds)

❖ Imagine that God is calling your name.

“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

What do you think God wants to say to you about your faith? (30 seconds)

❖ Imagine that God is calling your name.

“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

What do you think God is calling you to do?

What is your response to God’s call? Be honest and hold nothing back. You and God have much to share. (30 seconds)

You may open your eyes now.

The Reverend Janet Hunt shared this wonderful story about something that happened to her that really puts our readings today into perspective and I love the way she tells it. It goes like this:

“It was years ago now. I was still living in Rock Island and found myself traveling a great deal --- so much so that it was almost more 'normal' for me to be sleeping away from home than climbing the stairs to sleep in my second-floor bedroom on 22nd Avenue. When I was home though, it was not unusual to have a certain dream. At least it seemed like a dream. It was always in those first moments after I had drifted off to sleep. I would awake with a start, disoriented and convinced that I had a guest in my home. Only I was not prepared. For you see, I did not have guests often. And so, my guest room was used as 'storage' --- things were almost always piled on the single bed in there.

So there I would lie in my confusion, trying to sort out who it was who was there and as a result of my lack of hospitality had no place to sleep. Eventually, I would wake up enough to realize that it was, in fact, only a 'dream.' This happened more than once. It happened so many times, in fact, that finally, I began to share it with friends, who, though patient enough to hear me out as I described my 'dream,' could only shake their heads, as unable as I was to make sense of it.

This had been going on for some time before one friend suggested that I take it to my spiritual director. And so one Friday morning I did --- describing once more this dream and my reaction to it. I can still see Sister Audrey leaning forward, listening intently. When I was finished she paused and said, "Well, I can't say for sure, of course, but I can't help but wonder if your guest is Jesus."

To tell you the truth, at the time I was more than a little bit embarrassed. Of course, I couldn't say for sure either, but if it WAS Jesus? Well, then clearly, I was not making room --- I was unprepared. And I was not proud of this. Looking back now, I find I'm shaking my head at my reaction then. As if one could ever be fully prepared. More than that, what a wonder it is to think that perhaps Jesus would be so persistent in a way that I could sense it ---- to get near to me. Too much of the time it seems as though 'the word of the Lord is rare.' If I was, in fact, the recipient of such an experience? Well, wouldn't that be something?

And so I listen in today as the boy Samuel is being summoned in the night --- being called by name. Oh, I expect that together, you and I feel and completely understand his confusion for it was and still is a thing of wonder that God's voice would be calling us in the night. And yes, while the particulars are different, it would seem that God 'calling' me in the night is for much the same purpose He had with young Samuel so many generations ago. To be near to us. To make a home with us. To settle into our guest rooms --- and more than that, into the center of our lives.” (Dr. Janet Hunt at *Dancing With the Word*.)

God speaks to us in so many ways. Through the Word and not just the Bible, but the words we read in novels and other writings. Through the commonplace occurrences of our daily lives, at the grocery store or the post office. Through chance encounters with others, even strangers. Through our dreams and visions, something the bible is loaded with by the way. Any means that the Holy Spirit can imagine, constitute all the ways that God speaks to us. But will we like Samuel, Listen? Will we make room for God in the guest rooms of our hearts?

There was an old sitcom some of you may remember called, Frasier, which was about Dr. Frasier Crane, a successful Boston therapist, who moves to Seattle to get a new start on life; he has a radio talk show, which he uses to relay his wit and wisdom to others. It is considered a classic by many. He would always begin his radio talk show with the tagline, "This is Dr. Frasier Crane...I'm Listening."

And got me to wondering, how would our lives be different if this were how we began each day of our spiritual lives? Hello God, this is Jim...I'm listening. Hello God, this is Barb...and I'm listening. Hello God, this is Kathy, Regan, Sarah, Becky, Gerry, Kenny...I'm listening...or just as Samuel did by saying "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening."

As we begin this new year I pray that you might find room in your spiritual house for the One who is calling you as well. Thanks be to God. Let us pray...

Holy God ...

in the stillness of this sanctuary and the quiet of this set-aside time, we turn to you ...

As a community, but also on our own ...

Each of us, reaching for you ...

Call to us by name, O Lord.

Whisper to us.

Shout to us.

Grab our attention, so that we might turn toward your voice

And listen clearly for what you desire for us to hear ...

And help us answer with courage, "I'm Listening". Amen.