

Second Sunday after Epiphany, January 18, 2009 (Sermon outline)

Scriptures: 1 Samuel 3:1-10; Psalm 63:1-8; 1 Corinthians 6:11b-20; John 1:43-51

God is still speaking. Are we listening?

I was taken aback as I began Chapter 3 from 1 Samuel; “In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.” This has been my favorite story since childhood, and in my imagination it was a time when God spoke volumes to God’s people. Important as the call of Samuel was to me, I missed how important God’s action was in the life of Samuel, given the climate of the day.

It’s written clearly on the page ‘Eli’s eyes had grown dim’not only his outer vision, but also his inner vision. He was chosen to instruct Samuel, to encourage his faith formation, yet his own relationship with God floundered. It seems that Eli was not alone; God’s people had grown used to God’s silence, and blamed God for abandoning them. They no longer expected the God of their ancestors to intervene in their lives and sought their own way. So when Samuel first hears the call from God, he immediately thinks Eli needs help, and even though Eli tells him he didn’t call him Samuel returns twice more. On the third occasion Eli realizes that it is God calling the boy, he tells Samuel to respond with the words ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’

These seven words changed Samuel’s life – he became prophet, priest and leader.

In the passage from John’s Gospel we are told of the call of the disciples. First Andrew calls his brother Simon; and then Philip brings his brother Nathaniel to meet Jesus. Jesus, however, already knows Nathaniel – it seems they have never met in person and so Nathaniel concludes, as must we, that it is the hand of God at work. He responds ‘Rabbi, Son of God, King of Israel.’ A long way from the man who declared that nothing good could come out of Nazareth!

The Epistle reflects Paul’s experience of God’s action in his life.

Scripture records the many occasions in which ordinary people receive God's call and respond with amazing speed and seeming abandon. Sometimes we attribute this response to a different time and environment. We write it off as an experience unique to that specific individual; by doing so we shield ourselves from the questions that would undoubtedly change our lives.

At the core of each event is an encounter with God. God calls, the person listens, and lives are changed. Because they have opened themselves to God, God is able to work in and through them.

Our lives today are possibly more similar than we imagine to those persons in Samuel's time who no longer expected God to intervene in their lives. At one level we express a desire for a deep relationship with God, at another level we hope that said experience will not prove too much of an inconvenience.

Given our world situation many would say that God has abandoned us, and is no longer involved or cares about the happenings and events of our world. I would posit that nothing could be farther from the truth. I believe that God is still speaking, but most of us no longer listen.

Listening involves the whole person, heart, mind and spirit. It invites us to be quiet, to be still, and to be attentive. Listening involves a response or action following a time of discernment. The demands of our daily routine and distractions create a challenge to the process of listening with our whole being. When we fail to listen, we may go through periods of restlessness, a vague sense of loss, or even what we might mistakenly identify as mild depression. We know something is missing, we just don't know what. St. Augustine expressed his longing with the words:

*"O God! Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our souls are restless, searching,
'til they find their rest in Thee."*

This restlessness is an invitation for us to enter more deeply into relationship with God. It invites us to pay attention to those nudgings that trouble us. Rather than considering them negative, and seeking to

push them away, we are invited to follow Samuel's example and say: Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.' - The Rev. Christine Tinker