

Samuel                      Brenda                      Larry                      Mary                      Billy                      Jennifer

How do you react when someone calls you name? How do you respond? Do you get up right away or do you move slowly? Do you sometimes ignore the call? Well it probably depends on who is calling, and what they are calling you to do. I have very clear memories from my childhood of being called by my mother on Saturday mornings to hang out the laundry or do some other chore. I usually responded rather slowly not wanting to be dragged away from my book or the TV. Sometimes we don't welcome being called.

Sometimes we try to ignore it. Many times, it means disturbing whatever comfortable place we are in.

However, in this morning's Old Testament lesson, we don't notice any such hesitation on the part of Samuel, he just doesn't seem to recognize the voice that he is hearing." Each time he is called, even though it is the middle of the night, he goes right to Eli and says "Here I am." But each time Eli says, I didn't call you, go and lie down. Finally after three times, Eli figures out what is going on and tells Samuel what to do. Eli says that when he hears his name again he should say, "Speak Lord for your servant is listening."

Samuel presents himself to listen once he has figured out that the Lord is calling him, but what the Lord has to say is not easy for Samuel to hear. God is saying Eli and his sons are being put out. This is disturbing for Samuel because Eli is Samuel's master whom he serves. Eli's family is the priestly line of Israel - the family with power in the life of Israel. God is saying this authority is going to end. The house of Eli will be punished and a new thing is going to happen. God is doing a new thing. This thing will not be easy, but will create a difficult public crisis. This new thing will not be a grand religious act but a dangerous social beginning. Samuel knows what God has told him means and he is reluctant to tell Eli. However, when Eli asks Samuel tells him what the Lord has said and Eli accepts it. Eli accepts the removal of the authority of the priestly house from which he is a part of. Perhaps Eli knows he has fallen away from the Lord.

The road Samuel that is called to is not an easy road – in fact it is a very difficult one that takes down the very people who were his holy leaders. He receives a message from God that begins a time of radical dislocation and transformation in Israel. Sometimes this is what God calls for – change – when the sight of the ones who are in charge becomes dim, and they no longer see the light of God.

I was reading Martin Luther King Jr's letter from the Birmingham jail with this story of Samuel in my head. This letter was written to eight prominent clergy who had called Dr. King's activities "unwise and untimely." Dr. King writes to them in his letter of the injustices against black people in Birmingham, the need to stand up to unjust laws and his disappointment in their lack of support. These were the very people he had expected to be standing next to him in this struggle. These were the priests of our nation. Dr. King wrote that some of these ministers who he thought would be with him have been outright opponents and that many others have been more "cautious than courageous and have remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of stained-glass windows". He acknowledged that some have joined

him as active partners in the struggle and as a result have been dismissed from their churches, but yet there are still so many that have not joined. Martin Luther King Jr. was called. He was called to do a new thing – to change the ways things were – to speak out and demonstrate against the injustice that blacks lived under. This fighting for justice did not just bring him up against the elected leaders, but against ministers, ministers like him – fellow preachers of God’s Word. Sometimes even preachers of God’s word do not see the light.

How easy is it to not hear the call to justice or to ignore it? How easy is it to be one of those who is more cautious and courageous and who stand behind the security of the stained glass window. How easy is it to be part of the priestly household and to have our eyesight grow dim. It is very easy. Answering call means upheaval. It means being taken out of our comfort zone and putting our lives on the line. It is hard work. But this world is not yet as God dreamed. There is still injustice. There is still racism, lack of affordable housing, starvation and AIDS. This world still needs each and every one of us to answer God’s call - to step forward, and help God in the formation of God’s kingdom.

God calls us and sometimes, we, and yes, I mean WE , don’t seem to have a choice.

Sometimes God calls us, and no matter how much we don’t want answer, no matter how much we want to ignore, no matter how deaf and blind we pretend to be, God just stays there, in our prayers, in the presence of our friends, in the world around us, God just stays there calling to us, until we figure it out, until we can’t ignore God’s presence, until we accept the call. God keeps calling Samuel until Eli helps him recognize the call, and Samuel responds “Speak, for your servant is listening.” Imagine, being a child, and hearing the voice of God telling you that things are going to change around here, and by the way, your master is going to get it. It is probably not what Samuel wanted or expected to hear but God’s call can be difficult. Imagine being Dr. King called to bring to change in the segregated South.

He must have known the some of the hardships and danger we would face but in spite of the hardship and the danger, he followed. He answered his call. He knew was called by God, and his community knew he was called by God, and so he went forth. .

Now following God’s call down a difficult path is not what we generally seek out. In fact, even now you may be saying to yourself, “Well that’s all well and good for some people, but there is no way I am going to get involved in something that puts my way of life or my family on the line. If I have anything to do with it, I am not going to embark down some long and difficult path. I would never choose that.” But God is persistent God. He kept calling Samuel until he heard. Do you think Dr. King chose to go through being put in jail, to have his fellow clergy turn against him and then to be shot? People who follow God’s call, follow because they can do nothing else. They are drawn by the God they love. They follow because of God’s love that has been kindled in their hearts and that comes pouring out into the world. God’s desire becomes manifest in us and we become God’s hearts and hands in this world. God’s spirit fills us up and it becomes possible to travel that difficult path.

When your call comes along - the one that appeals to your heart, the ones that draws you in, the one that you were created for - you follow. You may try and ignore it. It may take years or decades for you to say yes, but God is there calling, nudging you in prayer, reaching out to

you through friends, family, co-workers, and even strangers. Your call may be to reach out to the homeless woman that you walk by every day or to make others aware of the AIDS epidemic in Africa or to be part of the re-building after Hurricane Katrina. Your call maybe to raise money for some of the amazing ministries that go on in and around this community or to deepen your faith journey. There are a myriad of things that God is calling each of us to.

So listen. God is calling you. God is calling us as individuals. God is calling us as people who live in the Washington DC area. God is calling us as the community of The Church of the Epiphany. So let not our sight grow dim and become comfortable behind our stained glass window or the doors of our homes. Let us take our fingers out of our ears and turn around to look at that nagging thought that has been in our heads. Think about that idea for change that runs through your heads every day that you let go. Listen with others and support each other in hearing our call. Following God's call is not an easy ride, but it is possible with God's guidance and the support of our faith community. This is how Samuel, Dr. King and many others before us followed the call. So Shh. Listen God is calling you – calling your name.

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