

“Who’s Calling”
Sermon: August 19, 2018
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“Hello – this is Kathie; I’m sorry I can’t talk with you now, so at the sound of the tone please leave a message. Thanks for calling and have a blessed day. Bye-bye.” That’s what you might hear if you call me.

One time I answered and pretended that I was the answering machine and when people start to speak, I said, *“Hey, just kidding ... I’m here.”*

Regardless of how I responded, the message was and is important. I want to know who’s calling.

Today’s scriptures have the theme of *being called*. Their subject is God calling people - a God who knows them both very well and is confident that they can live into their calling.

In the Gospel of John we heard about Nathaniel, also called Bartholomew whose friend Philip told him about Jesus who he believed was the Messiah. Even though the doubting Nathaniel had questioned this Jesus, saying, *“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”* he nonetheless, went with Philip.

Jesus, who obviously knew him, immediately characterized him as *“a man in whom there is no deception.”* He knew him well. Nathaniel accepted the call to discipleship and later was one of disciples to whom Jesus appeared at the Sea of Galilee after the Resurrection.

The Old Testament call story is about Samuel. This story is a personal favorite of mine; I find it very intriguing and have always enjoyed it – so much so that a few years ago I wrote this poem about Samuel’s call:

“Hello, who’s calling?” Samuel said.
From where he was resting on his Temple bed

“Here I am! Here I am!” he called to Eli
Who was wondering himself the source of the cry.

[You see, in those days The Lord’s voice was rare:
No one expected God’s Word in the air.]

A word about Eli – a pious priest
Whose sons were unruly like heirs of the beast
He couldn’t control them; they did what they wanted
And messed with the law while Eli just grunted.

So that night when Samuel ran into Eli
He might have been thinking of sons Phineas and Hophni.

He sent little Samuel back in his bed
But once again, "Samuel, Samuel," the voice said.

"Hello, who's calling?" Samuel responded
And ran to see Eli and what he wanted.

Again the Priest Eli said, "It wasn't me."
Samuel returned to the Temple – "Oh, gee."

The third time it happened and Sam said, "Hello,"
The old priest realized ["from all blessings flow"]
It must be Yahweh, Jehovah – God
He told Sam to listen; pay attention like on an iPod.

Samuel left and returned to his bed
He waited in silence and possible dread.
God's voice had been silent for many a year.
Why would God speak now? Was there something to fear?

And when the voice called him – in spite of his fears,
He listened up quickly and said, "I'm all ears!"

"Hello, who's calling?" he finally knew –
The Lord God almighty had gotten through.

God was persistent and still is today
Can you hear God calling? I pray, "Yes," you say.

The two readings this morning express the intimacy of a God who knows each of us so well that the tasks to which we are called are ones that God knows are achievable. We are called to be in relationship to God, and to love and care for others.

The call of Samuel and Nathaniel are stories of all the prophets called to speak out for God's ways of justice and righteousness.

That call is often not easy to follow. Many who have heard the call of God have had that call questioned by others. Samuel obviously had had a restless night probably tossing and turning just as we might when something is on our mind. When he got up and went running to old Eli saying, "Are you awake?"

Eli might have said, *"I am now! Go back to sleep, kid, you're hearing things!"* But, according to the story, he wasn't!

Samuel was called to do a difficult thing – to speak out against the Priest's own sons who were trying to get away with doing whatever they wanted by making sacrifices.

Samuel had to stand up against the family of the very person who had taken him in and cared for him, the very person who instructed him how to listen to God's ways.

No, it is not always easy to follow the call of the prophet.

There are times that we are called to speak out for God's ways of righteousness and justice against the very institutions that have nurtured us in the call itself. It is then that we have to overcome the voices of fear inside us or the voices of doubt outside us that tell us we haven't heard God's call at all and that we should go back and lie down, as Samuel was told to do.

Prophets are called to speak to conflict, to address it and not run from it, to speak and act out despite their own fears and the fears of others.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, in his letter from the Birmingham Jail, wrote to some of the very clergy who had supported him but also tried to stop him, in an attempt to avoid conflict. He lived his life as many of the Biblical prophets did, speaking and acting out for God's ways of justice and righteousness. Just as Samuel and Nathaniel were called so was he.

Being called by God might be troubling, especially if in the middle of the night. We may not say, *"Here I am, Lord; What do you want me to do?"*

There is a poem by children's poet Shel Silverstein called

"Prayer of the Selfish Child"
**Now I lay me down to sleep
I pray the Lord my soul to keep,
And if I die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my toys to break."**
So none of the other kids can use 'em.

That is not exactly an example of a "Here I Am" response.

It took Samuel a few times to hear God's voice. Remember that during those times few people were hearing God speak. Scriptures say, *"The Word of the Lord was rare in the land."*

It is difficult to say, “*Here I am*” because we aren’t ready for God to come into our rooms and dreams and life looking into our innermost being.

I believe that God calls each of us - not just to follow, but also to do and say particular things at particular times, just like Samuel was called to address a difficult and possibly uncomfortable situation.

Jesus used the words “*Here I am!*” frequently; he knew their meaning. When tempted he said, ‘*Here I am, torn with ambition.*’ When weeping at Lazarus’ tomb, he said, “*Here I am, wanting this cup to pass from me.*” On the cross, after muttering, “*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me,*” he said, “*Into thy hand I commit my spirit. Here I am, Lord, I am yours completely and fully.*”

Consider the words, “*Here I Am*” the next time you wake up in the middle of the night or day and sense God calling. With sincerity in your heart, respond positively.

God knows our strengths and our weaknesses very intimately and asks us to do nothing outside of our capabilities. Let us live into God’s ways of love, justice and righteousness for all people.

*God was persistent
And still is today
Can you hear God calling?
I pray, “Yes,” you say.*

AMEN.