

National Guard in Capitol; Threats of Violence in State Capitols; Inauguration in three days  
1 Samuel 3:1-20 • Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18 • 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 • John 1:43-51

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Sam...: The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.  
Ps.: You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways  
1 Cor: But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.  
John: He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."

## **Can we Tell the Truth about Call?**

Here we are again.

We are here recording on Thursday, not knowing how the world will change and change again before our words and music and prayers reach you on Sunday morning.

And yet we hear in our readings timeless words and stories, the lovely and rich call story of the last great prophet-leader of Israel, Samuel; the beautiful, poetic psalm of the inescapable love of God, the call of Philip and Nathanael, who are eager and primed and ready to answer the call to follow Christ.

Nothing I can say can speak more truth than the truth we find in these lovely stories, and yet these stories help us open ourselves to how God is calling us in these tumultuous times.

We must protect ourselves from the delusion that serving God and answering the call of God on our lives solves all of our problems and allows us to stand apart and above the complex and endless troubles the human family ceaselessly makes, and so for a few brief moments, let us open our hearts and minds to the Spirit as we seek to answer the call of God on our lives in this time and place.

Let us Pray: May the words of my mouth,  
And the meditations of our hearts this day,  
Be pleasing to you,  
O Lord our God:  
Our Rock and Our Redeemer.

In 2005, my last year in Seminary, I served at Samuel UCC in Clayton, MO.

It began at an Evangelical church, populated by German immigrants who came to America and built churches and orphanages and hospitals, and seminaries.

Above the balcony, facing east so as to capture the light as sunrise, was a stained glass window of the call of Samuel.

The German Evangelicals who built the church and chose this story to inspire the congregation and to tell the world who they were as a people chose these words from the text we read this morning, for these words are the heart of this story:

Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.

This is, after all, the part of the story we most fondly recall, the part of the story where we say yes, the beginning of the journey, that moment of certainty and clarity when we see the truth and hear God's call, a time or an event we look back on, turning points in our lives when we were forever changed.

We often forget the struggle and difficulty that opens our hearts to the call of God on our lives and disremember how easy we thought our lives would be after that stunning brilliant moment.

"Here I am Lord. Speak for your Servant is Listening" are words we say when we encounter the end and limit of ourselves and experience the truth and the light of God, and what lies ahead of us when we open ourselves to the call of God on our lives?

Everything falls into place?

Everything just kind of works out without much work, without any conflict or difficulties?

Pardon me, but where do we find such an easy road in scripture?

Certainly not in the story of the disciples when they answer Christ's call to serve?

Nor the prophets who are harassed and dismissed and persecuted, whose prophetic vision is celebrated after they are dead and gone.

And not in the story Samuel, his peaceful sleep disrupted by a voice he does not know how even to answer.

Again and again he goes to the God he knows, Old Eli, and finally Eli understands this young and tender soul is himself hearing the voice of God calling him for the first time, the time has come for Samuel to answer for himself.

Let's not pass over this moment too quickly, this transformation, for Eli tells Samuel to wait alone in the dark rather than running to him for guidance--the lamp of God had not yet gone out on Eli's watch, we are told, as we see when Eli moves Samuel from depending on him to answering for himself to God who calls him in the night.

And here we find the great danger and challenge of the call of God on our lives we prefer to forget, for the message given to Samuel is judgment against Eli and his house, an irrevocable judgment because he has allowed his sons to abuse their office and has failed to restrain them.

Samuel hears God speak for the first time, and lays in bed through the night worrying about what to do next, afraid to tell Eli his vision, hoping he can just put it behind him and forget it, that Eli won't remember to ask about it....

He rises in the morning to do his morning chores, opening the doors of the house of God, perhaps praying there will be a throng of worshippers to sweep in and distract Eli from talking with him.

We don't often talk about the fear and regret that goes along with the call of God on our lives, when we see what sacrifices will be demanded of us, how our relationships will change, when we may well wonder, like Samuel, whether Eli will throw him out of the temple and disown him to protect himself and his sons.

How many times has someone we loved been trapped in addiction or abusive relationships or destructive patterns of behavior and are afraid like Samuel is for what happens next? For surely the devastation of addiction on lives is a form of God's call for change. Surely the physical and emotional havoc of abuse is a form of God's call for change. Surely the despair of being trapped in endless patterns of destructive behavior is a form of God's call for change. Yet what comes next is always a step of faith into the unknown, and what comes next will surely be a feeling of fear and regret.

Friends, we have such a clear record in scripture.

Can we agree to tell the truth?

The Call of God is never easy on us, and it always demands just a bit more than we ourselves have resources to meet,

It moves us toward rather than away from challenges.

But the truth is also that in these challenges God meets us and provides for us and makes a way for us. We later look back and tell the story of how God disrupted us from spiritual sleep and gave us a vision that challenged us to live by faith in God.

Like Old Eli, my message for all of you Samuels is to struggle with your own sense of call rather than depend on me, for God does not just call pastors but God calls people, and we together are called to discern how God calls us in these challenging times.

Human suffering and political foment are a form of God's call: challenges rousing us out of our comfortable sleep and demanding so much of us we are afraid to take the first step.

For this reason, we pray for courage. For this reason, we remember Samuel's courage in telling the truth to Eli. For if we answer the call of God our lives, we become courageous enough to welcome challenges, and in these challenges God makes a way for us.

And so dear friends, for these challenging times we are facing together,

May God bless you and your family and your friends and neighbors,  
And may God Bless Windsor UCC