

## 1 Samuel 3:1-20

### Can you hear it?

#### *Listening for God*

A young farmer, standing in his field, observes a peculiar cloud formation. The clouds form the letters G, P, and C, and he thinks them a call from God: *Go preach Christ!*

The farmer rushes to the deacons of his church and insists that he has been called to preach. Respectful of his enthusiasm and passion, they invite him to fill the pulpit.

That Sunday, the sermon is long, tedious, virtually incoherent. When it finally ends, the leaders sit in stunned silence. Finally, a wizened deacon mutters to the would-be preacher, "Seems to me the clouds were saying 'Go plant corn.'"<sup>1</sup>

Thankfully when I came here to preach for the call I didn't get the same response.

Getting a call to ministry to God's people comes in many different ways, but one thing always seems to hold true, more than just you have to think that it is God's call.

I had a very strong and clear call from God to go into ministry. The story is one that would have someone wondering if I had lost my mind, but as I felt this call to ministry, I also said to God. Lord, I am a Presbyterian, I know this is an inward call, but you need to send me two people who know nothing of this who can confirm it is from you. It took about six months of prayer, but eventually God did send two people on separate occasions who simply asked the question, "Have you ever thought about going into ministry?"

Now you have to realize no one in my forty-six years before that had ever spoken those words, or even suggested ministry, so to hear these words was to a me a clear affirmation that I was to pursue this calling. Turns out that once the flood gates opened, many people confirmed that call, my session, congregation, presbytery, Knox College, finally through you, the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

You see it takes a congregation to give the final seal on the call before the Presbyterian Church in Canada will ordain a student. When the search committee had me come and preach for the call back in July of 2013 and you voted to have me come that was the final connect between that day in 2008 when I felt God calling me to ministry and the community of faith sealing the deal.

---

<sup>1</sup> Source unknown

I can tell you from stories I have heard, for many this idea of being called by God takes years of discernment and prayer. It would be safe to say that for most people a call to ministry is a little more mystery and harder to hear. For many it is a nudge or lots of nudges to the heart and mind.

What I love about the story of Samuel is that it is a child who has heard the call of God. He didn't know it at first. He thought it was his teacher and mentor Eli that was calling him. Even Eli in his half-awakened state didn't figure out it was God until the third time. But in the end, it was understood that God was calling this boy, he heard it and it was confirmed by someone Samuel trusted and knew had knowledge of these things.

Not everyone of course is called to the priesthood like Eli and Samuel or ordained to ministry as minister in the Presbyterian Church. I would have to say that I have felt the call of God on my own life many times, long before I was ordained. The two major calls on my life were to bring joy into the world through teaching music, particularly piano, and the call to eldership in the Presbyterian Church.

Just last fall we ordained two people to eldership here at St. Andrew's. Each felt God had pulled them in this direction, but it was again through your affirmation in the votes that those two and others who had already been ordained to the eldership, along with the confidence the current session had in these people, that our session came together again with the elders who are currently serving.

Samuel's call gives us a chance to consider how we and others are called to live out our lives in the church, in our families, and in the community. One thing to note is that there are many and various ways that God call individuals to certain things. Thinking only of biblical stories, Paul had the blinding experience on the road to Damascus, Ezekiel had a vision, Jeremiah had an increasing intensifying sense of moral compulsion, and now Samuel hears God's voice.

It takes listening for God to even know that God is calling you to something. If you are not expecting to hear God, not likely you will. Even if God is calling, you will write it off as something else.

A call from God always requires a response. Your response may be to not listen, but if you choose to listen and check it out, you may be surprised by how God will use you in the lives of others and in the life of the church.

How does one know if they have heard and responded to God's call? Well, as I mentioned we never do it alone. It is in part what the work of the church is – to help us discern what God is saying. This is why personal spirituality, though important, is not the end of faith. Faith and calling are lived out in community.

In our day of new-age spirituality, when people are busy with personal affirmations and living life on the own terms, we don't like to think that we need anyone else to help us with our living and our journey. Rarely do we have conversations about God and faith

outside of these church walls. Sometimes I am not sure if we are considering God even within these walls, but rather trusting our own judgements and desires.

But again, this is why Christ called disciples together, and created the church. This wasn't just out of convenience, so that like-minded people could hang out together, it was so they could help each other live out their spiritual calling and have support as they lived and worked in the world.

It is also why as a church we need to be paying attention to what God is saying to us. Each of us is needed to determine what God is calling our church to. Sometimes, like Eli, the news we have to share is of change and justice, which are not easy messages to hear.

Part of understanding if you or this church is headed in the right direction will be that once you/we've take action do you experience, does the church experience, God's pleasure and joy? This is not something I can quantify scientifically, but comes out of lived experience. It is something that is known and felt. It comes out of the real and present gift of the Holy Spirit.

So often when I preach I find that words escape me to adequately explain or describe what it means to experience God present and real. This is just such and occasion. Again, this is why the community of faith is so important, talking about our faith is so important. It is in the lived experience, the shared stories of individuals and of the church that we can discern how, where, and when God is at work.

As we begin this New Year, maybe we can make this a year of listening, of sharing, of trusting and with Samuel can say, "Speak, for your servant is listening." Amen.