

“When God Calls You”

1st Samuel 3:1-11

1/16/2000 – Maryvale Drive Presbyterian Church, Philip Siddons

One millennium ago, the European culture still called itself “Roman” but everything about that Byzantine world had become Greek. The empire was based at Constantinople, named after the Emperor. Scholars and leaders were involved in a Renaissance of their time. They had created encyclopedias and art flourished – especially in creating representations of Christ’s life.¹ There were breakthroughs in mathematics and astronomy.²

Two millennia back, God became incarnate in Jesus Christ and showed us exactly what we should be doing with our lives.

Three millennia ago, there was a little boy named Samuel whose mother’s name was Hannah.³ In your private reading, sometime, you may want to read the context about the life of Samuel and notice the many parallels found in the life of John the Baptist and his mother Elizabeth.

Today’s passage is about God’s call to the boy Samuel. It happened in a time in which God was thought to rarely speak – ‘few, then, had visions from God’ says the writer.

Samuel was serving as an Intern for Eli, the well-aged priest for the small town of Shiloh. In the middle of the night, God called Samuel’s name and he naturally thought it was Eli who was calling. Had we been him, we would have thought the same. But after three times of being wakened by Samuel, with all of the decades of his being focused on matters of spirituality (as well as the cult of Jewish religion) – Eli figured it out. His intern was apparently having a holy moment initiated by God.

I think God was probably doing Sam a favor by not immediately appearing to him in the middle of the night. Whenever Beings (from the very presence of

¹ Referred to as Icons

² Leo of Salonika (c850) would be the person to look up on the math and science of that time.

³ If you compared the life of Hannah (1st Samuel 2:1ff) and Elizabeth (Luke 1:39ff), you would find a lot of truly interesting parallels. Both women could not have children but God granted it. They both birth children who would become prophets and the stories revolved around the temple cult.

God) allowed themselves to be perceived by humans, they always had to back off, a bit, and work on calming them down before they got down to conveying their message. We’re all so conditioned to think and act as if there isn’t anything but what we can see and touch. We seem dead set against believing otherwise. But, of course, when we will have crossed over to be in the fully realized presence of God, this will no longer be the case.

“What are you doing today” someone might ask us.

To which we might respond, “Oh, I might go to the hummingbird races with God and then take a walk over by the mountains.”

What God did tell the boy was that Eli’s two priest-sons, who now were running that organized religion, had become so corrupt, that God was going to finish them off. Worst of all, Samuel was supposed to tell this to Father Eli at the breakfast table.

Upon hearing of this revelation, Eli didn’t flinch. He already knew his kids were corrupt and had sternly warned them but they just wouldn’t listen. “It’s the Lord saying this so whatever has to happen, that’s the way it will be” Eli wisely responded to the news.

In imagining God actually speaking to you, you’re probably remembering Bill Cosby’s sense of the unusualness of such an experience. Remember this thing with Noah – who, after hearing his name voiced from above, responded “Who is this? Am I on canned camera?” We’re not used to hearing voices from Beings we cannot see and Samuel was no different.

Another comedienne, Lilly Tomlin, once said that “When people talk to God, it’s called ‘prayer;’ but when God talks to people, it’s called ‘schizophrenia.’” Today, most people don’t have room in their so-called “modern and sophisticated” lives for God speaking to them.

Three thousand years after Samuel’s experience of God calling him, we experience the same kind of estrangement from the things of God. Today, God seems silent to us and our society. We’re so distracted by our chores and ambitions and downright busyness – that we don’t stop to think about God calling us and

giving us instructions for our lives. Has God spoken to you this morning? – and I don't ask that to be facetious.

Well how about this – how real is God to you now, as you're sitting here? Where is God, really? Is it that God isn't speaking to you personally or is it that you aren't bothering to be open to listen to hear God speaking to you? That's what I suspect is most often the case – we're so focused elsewhere that we aren't open for the reality of the presence of God.

Just as in the times three thousand years ago, organized religion and the clergy today aren't much help in teaching us how God speaks to us. You only get a handful of these charismatic public speakers in religion talking about the reality of God – and they *do* stand out from the crowd. But few religious spokespersons seem to take God seriously and currently there's a void of spiritual leadership in our society. So when a few religious spokespersons actually use clear references to "God's will," we kind of stop, for a minute, and take notice. But as soon as they tie in what they're saying to us with our next contribution to their enterprise, it doesn't set right.

They're using a lot of 'God' words and talking *as if* they've just come out of a briefing session with God but they're not down on their knees holding dying AIDS victims in Calcutta – like Mother Theresa. They're not talking from a prison cell because they've been arrested for crying out against the injustices of the powerful establishment – like Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King. They are not fully present and up-to-their elbows in bringing *practical* good news to the poor. They apparently aren't trying to get people unstuck from what is enslaving them. They aren't participating in healing the sick and doing the very risky (and scary) work of changing the institutional rules and attitudes that so severely oppress those with less power. But, then, how much are you or I doing in that regard? So God works with who's available.

What are the ways God calls you or speaks to you? How is it that we come to be called by God to do God's work?

I think it is different for each of us but not so subjective that we have to shrug our shoulders and give up being mindful of *any* particular way God may speak to us. In my opinion, I think it isn't really our

business to judge others in *how* they hear God. All that matters is if you hear God. Forget about others; does God speak to you? Are you listening? What is God saying to *you*?

The people of God, through the centuries, have declared that Jesus Christ was God's biggest message to the world. But even Jesus told His listeners that they don't really need to see someone, they know, come back from the dead – because God has been speaking through prophetic voices for centuries. That should have been enough, He said.

So we have the scriptures that have clearly changed people's lives.⁴ And sometime in your personal life, your parents, your grandparents, friends, early childhood Sunday School experiences – God may have spoken directly to you through those people and experiences.

Some of you, I know, have had near death experiences and have been flat on your back on a gurney in a dim and cold hallway of a hospital corridor – realizing that this could be it. You may have had significant emotional experiences that so derailed your entire life that God finally got your attention enough to convince you that there are meaningful and purposeful tasks with which you should be involved. You may have even experienced the intense kindness of another person in such a way that you know, in your heart of hearts, that you have been 'touched by an angel.'⁵

I think the first thing, in which we've got to get in touch, is the fact that God is not down in the unemployment line hoping to get a job. God is the Creator of the universe (and well beyond) and has absolutely no limitations in what can be done. God is earthshakingly holy and powerful, beyond any human utterances or imagination, and the only reason, I suspect, that we are not permitted to fully see that God is right by our side is it would absolutely kill us. Some of those angels are flying around with wings covering their eyes and the rest of their bodies for a reason.

First, before anything else, we've got to get the terrifying holiness and the power of God right. We

⁴ We talked about this extensively in our class on the book "Know Why You Believe" by Paul Little.

⁵ Take a look at that television show sometimes. This is not typical network programming!

can't screw around with our lives and not take God seriously. Never even say the word "God" in your casual conversation without expecting the earth to tremble and swallow up everything around you – leaving you standing on the top of a very skinny mountain peak in the middle of the Grand Canyon – with a powerful spotlight shining right on you.

Take God seriously – as if your life and soul depends upon it.

The second thing that we ought to get right is that God is also crazy about us. God remembers we are dust; . . . and just how a dad compassionately loves his kid, so God loves you and me.⁶ God speaks to us but we're not going to be able to run down to Blockbuster and rent a video on the several ways God has been documented to speak to us. God is far too creative and powerful to be limited to predictable means. How God speaks to us is not anywhere near as important as whether or not we're actually open to God speaking to us.

So far, anthropologists and educators have determined that there are at least three ways you and I take in information and experience life around us. Usually each of us prefer one way more than the others.

Some of us take in our world through **listening and verbal conversation**. Those with this preference enjoy going to lectures or being in contexts where someone is presenting and they get to listen to and absorb what is being said. Conversations are similar, only the outer-world-oriented⁷ people get a chance to express their thoughts out loud in the arena of verbal conversation. They'll talk back and share during a class. Audio and or verbal preference people give directions to a location by giving you an exact sequence of street names and distances to travel before turning.

Some of us take in our world more visually. They see what is going on and compare their visual snapshots to the library of scenes stored in their mind. They're often artists and in conversation, they frequently say "I see what you mean." They enjoy movies more than lectures.⁸ They give directions to a

⁶ Psalm 103

⁷ "Extroverts"

⁸ If they talk about the history of the Art of Christ, they'll show

location by only referring to building shapes and colors and visual landmarks.

Kinesthetic people learn by touching and doing. They are **doers** and they want as much hands-on experience as they can get. They are totally board if they have to sit and listen to someone talk or must look at something that they can't touch. They give you directions to a location by taking your hand and walking or driving you there. "Let's just do it now" they may say.

This relatively recent understanding of how we take in our world is further helped by educators who additionally take into consideration our other human senses. Creative teachers are having classes taste food to support a point. They use art and colors or have their students listen to music while doing work. Unfortunately, the history of education has often been geared to only one small segment of society (that prefers memorizing words and mathematical equations). The rest of us have had to learn what we needed on our own – outside of the traditional educational system.

But the point of it is that God knows every proton, neutron and electron of every living and dead cell in our bodies. God certainly has easy ability to communicate to us – and it might be through what we hear in a conversation or read, what we see or even in what we touch, feel or do. But are you listening, looking or touching to take in what God is saying to you?

When was the last time God got something across to you? Were you open for it? Are you now? To what lengths has God been going to get your attention? I sure have missed a lot of what God has been trying to say to me through the years.

Since I am a visual person, there have been times when God has spoken to me through people, through context and positioning of people and what they do, . . . through images of nature, . . . but also through tastes, texture, color, sound and smells. I used to get phone calls from Verna Bird and something she would say would sound like a direct message from God. It isn't usually until after the fact that it comes to me that God has been trying to get my attention. Usually it has

you the pictures.

scared me when I realized the number of the different *ways* God seems to have been using to get my attention. Some means God tried were more subtle. Others were right in my face – and still I’ve missed these attempts.

‘How much more inattentiveness, on my part, was God going to put up with?’ I’ve wondered after the fact. At times I’ve realized that I have been incredibly dense. But we both know that God is the God of second chances.

How many times have we been hearing, speaking, seeing or doing something when ‘it just comes to us,’ . . . when it just occurs to us, in a quiet sacred moment of time, that Someone else has been trying to get through – but we’ve been missing it? You’ve had these moments. You know, that gut sense of understanding – the ‘a ha’ dawn of realization – that all this time we’ve been overlooking this amazing gracefulness God has been bestowing on us – despite our headstrong know-it-all bull-charging-through-a-china-shop stampede we’ve been making through our narrow little lives.

So what is it going to take for us to stop and see, hear or feel that God is trying to tell us? Only you can control what you’re going to do with your life for God. I’m suggesting that in the silence, in the darkness and in the stillness – what you are to do will come to you. You will know it is God getting through to you *if* you truly believe in God. Listen. Look. Do. God is too holy for us not to pay attention. ■