

## **2EPIPHANYB11 1 SAM 3:1-10(11-20)**

My entire household has been felled by upper respiratory bugs and we are all on antibiotics. My roommate, also a pastor, is close to pneumonia. I have a bad sinus infection. And the dog, Dudley the handsome, sweet, cuddly, gentle wonder dog, has an infection in his throat that makes him sound like a Baritone when he tries to bark, instead of his usual tenor voice. And the usual hustle and bustle of the household, with lots of talking and howling (by Dudley, not by Bev or me) has been pretty much absent this week as we all recuperate. The quiet, not quite silence, has been welcome.

This is especially true since it seems like I spent my entire vacation in conversation with someone or several someones, catching up with family and friends. And then I hit the ground running here last week and had conversations with some of you and, of course, Janet. I was afraid that I would lose my voice, which often happens when I have a sinus infection, but such was not the case, thank goodness.

When you stop and think about it, isn't it amazing how much time we spend in conversation? We talk a lot! And, whether we like it or not, the world talks to us. Each human voice we hear makes a claim on us. All of the voices around us define our relationships, and if we're perfectly honest, some voices are more important to hear than others. Depending on who's speaking, we either tend to listen well, tune out, or shut down altogether.

But this week, with the unusual quiet in the house, I was able to remember how important it is to listen, too, not just to the voices around us and our own inner voices, but also to God's voice. Because, as people of faith, we need to acknowledge that in one way or another, we're in a constant conversation with God.

Samuel is 12 years of age in our story from today's scripture passage, and is doing one of his jobs, protecting the Ark of the Covenant. Sometime during the night, he heard his name. It must be Eli calling me, he thought to himself. Did you call me? No, go back to sleep. The voice spoke again, calling his name. Did you call me? No, I didn't. Go back to sleep! Can you imagine how hard and how fast Samuel's heart must have been pounding?

I would've been turning on the lights, reaching for my baseball bat and wishing that Dudley slept in my room! The phone would be in my lap, my fingers would be poised for 911, and I would be doing anything and everything except falling asleep. When the voice came for the third time, Samuel began a conversation with God that challenged and changed the lives of his people and radically changed his own life forever.

Samuel was called that night to a lifetime of service and obedience. He helped change the history of God's people, Israel. God saw in the boy someone whom God could use as a prophet, and the Prophet Samuel ended up being the one to tell Eli that his priestly days were over and that a new day had begun. And then God used him to choose the first 2 Kings over Israel.

“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

The voice of God calls us, too. Somewhere in the noise and clutter of all of the other voices in our lives, we have to listen for and want to hear God's voice. There are three uncontrollable and predictable characteristics of being called: 1) that God has a habit of asking us to do the very thing that we've said we would never be caught dead doing, 2) we're often called to do what we perceive to be out of our reach, and 3) God often calls us when and where we least expect it and responding to God's voice may not always be easy.

Rebekah was drawing water at a city well. Moses was tending sheep. Paul was on a road trip to Damascus. Lydia was selling purple cloth at Thyatira. Many of the disciples were tending to their nets. Augustine was working in his garden. Luther was occupied with personal issues in his monastery. And Martin Luther King, Jr., whose birthday we celebrate tomorrow, was a young pastor in the South when he felt God calling him to an even greater ministry, one that challenged this country to become free of racism, free of prejudice, free of its need to oppress some of its members for the benefit of others. His was a wake-up call for us to become the people God wanted and continues to want us to be.

What is God calling you to do today? Is it to volunteer at Interfaith, or another organization? Is God calling you into service in your new – or continuing – role as an officer of the church, or as a member of its Committees? Are you being called to try your hand at teaching Sunday school, or being a liturgist or scripture reader? Is God calling you to create prayer blankets and shawls, or share the gift of fellowship in the various ways we have to do that here at Park? Or maybe you're being called to do other things at home, or in the community?

God continues to call each of us into ministry here, as individuals and as a congregation, and asks us to keep on marching into the future, and we can hold fast to the promise that God will provide what we need if we're willing to risk and use what we have to reach out into a world of injustice for God's sake and to God's glory.

And even when we're hard of hearing or choose not to listen, Jesus will take our hand and lead us into places we would never dare to approach

or dream of going to on our own. There is good news in the season of Epiphany. God comes to us no matter who or where we are. Can you respond to God's call with the faith of Samuel? "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

Say it with me. "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." Now say it again, not to me, but to God. "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." May we say what we mean and mean what we say - always.

Amen