

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

June 3, 2018, The 2nd Sunday of Pentecost, 9th Sunday of Ordinary Time

II Corinthians 4:5-12, I Samuel 3:1-20

“SPEAK LORD, FOR YOUR SERVANT IS LISTENING”

A couple weeks ago at the beginning of the Adult Sunday School class that meets in the Library someone asked: “How do you know when God is speaking in your life?” We spent the rest of the class beginning to answer that question.

I’ve continued to think about our conversation
and then this week’s lectionary text was the story of Samuel and God,
and I knew I wanted to bring this conversation into the Sanctuary
and continue it with all of you this morning.

How do we know when God is speaking or calling in our lives?
How do we listen for God’s voice?
How do we tell if it is God speaking?
How do we choose what to do when we hear God?

First I think it’s really important to say that God does speak in all of our lives. In Jesus we are each named as adopted sons and daughters of God, and God’s speaks to all of God’s children.

God lives and moves and breathes in all of our lives.

God speaks in our lives, when we are children (scholars believe that prophet Samuel was about twelve years old in the story we read this morning), God speaks in our lives when we are teens, when we are young adults, middle aged adults, and adults of a certain unnamed age and maturity.

No matter your age God is speaking in your life, seeking to guide your life!

Part of answering the question of how God speaks in your life, is taking that risk of faith to believe that God is speaking in your life.

So, if we trust that God is speaking, how do we listen?

I believe the story of the Samuel gives us some guidance for how to listen for God’s voice.

First, Samuel was with the priest Eli at the temple at Shiloh. Samuel was with people who worshiped God.

Now, please don’t hear me saying that God only speaks to church-goers. This is not a lecture about going to church!

But do hear me saying that one of the ways that God speaks to us is when we are with the community of faith.

God speaks to us as we worship God together: through hymns, through hearing the Bible read and sermons preached, through the Communion meal, through witnessing baptisms, or being baptized, or having our children or grandchildren baptized. God speaks to us through prayers of confession, as we bring our offering, as we are guided to worship by our choirs, as we sing “We Are One in the Spirit,” our hands united, as we listen to the Children’s Sermon, and during fellowship together after worship.

Samuel was with God’s people in the place of worship in Shiloh, and God spoke to him there. One of the many places that God speaks to us is in God’s house.

One of the parts of Samuel's story that gives me hope and comfort is that God keeps calling to Samuel, until Samuel understands that he is hearing God's voice.

As we think about God speaking in our lives I think we can find comfort that God is not one of those parents who says: "I'm only going to tell you this once."

Or the parent who says: "I'm giving you to the count of three." One...two....

God continues to call our name, until we listen and hear God's voice.

God continues to interrupt our lives, God is persistent,

In love, God has plans for our lives, and invites us to listen.

Which raises the question, how do we know we are hearing God's voice? How does God speak to us?

There are some who do have the spiritual gift of actually hearing God's voice, although it seems to me this is a rare gift, or one not often talked about.

I have known people who heard God speak very clearly to them in their dreams.

I've known others who talk about an internal knowing, something they feel in their gut, or in their heart of hearts.

I have artist friends who "hear" God speaking as they draw, or paint, or design multi-media creations.

We may hear God speaking to us in a Bible reading we are doing on our own, or one we hear in the Sanctuary.

Sometimes God speaks in the devotional we use.

God speaks through music, music with words and without words.

Sometimes I have felt God's guidance in books of fiction and non-fiction, when a sentence or paragraph seem like they were written specifically for me.

God speaks to us through creation: through the beauty of a sunset, a night sky filled with stars, a small flower growing up through the sidewalk, the sun on the water, the sound of the rain, the silence of falling snow, the loving smile on the face of someone who loves us.

And God often speaks in times of silence, which asks us to learn to be in silence so we can listen.

We talked in class about how sometimes God speaks to us through other people. We see that in Samuel's story. We also see that Samuel needed the wisdom of another person of faith to help him understand that he was hearing God.

In this story it was Eli who perceived the Lord was calling Samuel.

The gift of having people of faith in our lives is they can help us listen for God speaking in our lives. Pastors, friends, Sunday School Teachers, youth leaders, and other counselors and mentors can help us listen for how we hear God calling.

When you are trying to make a decision, when you think God is guiding you in a certain direction, when you aren't sure what the next faithful step is in your life, talk to the people God has put into your life.

Come into my office, call your friend and invite yourself over, got sit in Starbucks with that wise mentor in your life, ask someone here at church to help you listen.

Sometimes I find it helpful to have a friend listen to me talk about listening for God because it helps me "hear" what I know in my heart of heart.

There are many ways to listen for God.

And did you notice in this morning's story that Eli gives Samuel the words to speak when he next hears God call? It is important to have "Elis" in our lives. We need those friends in the faith who can help us listen and respond.

So how do we respond when we hear God calling to us? I think it's important to say that God speaks to us about big things and little things in our lives.

There are big calls to life and ministry and faithfulness
and small calls to life and ministry and faithfulness.

This is why you have two bulletin covers this morning. If you turn to page two you will find a meme I was given this week by a clergywoman friend at a lunch. I love the truth and humor it holds and I just had to share it with you.

And then the lectionary was the story of Samuel's call to be a prophet so it was perfect timing, or maybe it's better to say God's timing!

Sometimes God's call in our lives is disruptive, life changing and asks a lot of our hearts, souls and lives. Your hair may even stand on end!

If you look carefully at the picture though, you'll see how tightly the older child is holding onto the younger one. God holds onto us when God calls us to change, to do something risky, to change our heart and the way we are living, or to deepen our faith and journey in a new way.

Not to take this meme too literally though, I don't believe God laughs at us. But I do believe God holds a great joy for where we are going on this journey of life. God knows the plans God has for our lives.

Now if you turn to the front cover of the bulletin you'll find a poem by the Rev. Thom Shuman whose worship words we have used many times. I like this poem because it reminds us that God calls us in ways that seem small, but may be life-changing for someone else.

Listen from your own life to this poem, called "called."

called

in the store, parking lot,
or the walks in the neighborhood,
i heard you calling clear as a bell, but
when i turned around, you
were nowhere to be seen;

i remember the embarrassment
(too many times)
of being so busy, that
it took a stranger tapping me
on the shoulder and saying,
'i think you're being paged,'
to realize that you have been trying
(doggedly)
to get me to notice;

in the tears of a child
over her sick pet,
you call;

in the memories
of a hospice patient,
you call;
in the whisper
of hope into loneliness'
empty nights,
you call;
in the sudden
burst of forgiveness
from the depths of hurt,
you call.

help me
to pay attention.

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There is a final part of Samuel's story that tells us a lot about God's loving calling in each of our lives: God calls Samuel by name.

God specifically calls Samuel by name

because God specifically chose Samuel to be a prophet of the Lord.

Just as God specifically calls you and me into lives of service, ministry and love for our God, neighbors, our selves, and our world.

God calls to us in many ways, and the promise of faith is that we are known by name and called by name to live those lives of faith.

The next time we hear God calling, and God will call, may Eli's words for Samuel be words that we borrow to say yes to our God: "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening!"

God: "I have a plan for your life"
What it feels like:

