

“Casting Nets”

January 14, 2018 – 2nd Epiphany/Ordinary

1 Samuel 3:1-10, (11-20)

3:1 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. 3:2 At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; 3:3 the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was.

3:4 Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" 3:5 and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down.

3:6 The LORD called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." 3:7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

3:8 The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. 3:9 Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. 3:10 Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." Then the Lord said to Samuel, "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle. 3:18 So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. Then he said, "It is the LORD; let him do what seems good to him." 3:19 As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. 3:20 And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the LORD

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

6:12 "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are beneficial. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. 6:13 "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food," and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 6:14 And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. 6:15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! 6:16 Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, "The two shall be one flesh." 6:17 But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. 6:18 Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? 6:20 For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

John 1:43-51

1:43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."

1:44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 1:45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." 1:46 Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Philip said to him, "Come and see." 1:47 When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" 1:48 Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." 1:49

Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" 1:50 Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." 1:51 And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

In Epiphany one of our revelations, our Epiphanies, about God is that our God is a calling God. Our God enlists people, all sorts of people, including people like us, to do that which needs to be done in the world. This is of course, in the church, a fairly popular topic of discussion.

We have a couple of stories today that prominently feature people who are around the age of these young people in blue over here in the choir loft. These are discipleship stories. And they happen to be stories about very young people making difficult decisions to be followers of the God who calls them when, both then and now, there is a whole world of choices that can be made.

The story from 1st Samuel begins “The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.” One could argue that we, too, live in a time when there’s a lack of words from God. There are a lot of words, it’s just hard to figure out which words are God’s words. We use a lot of words in the church and in this church. At the top of the list is – God loves you. Don’t ever forget or doubt that God loves you. After that we do our best to remind us to try and be descent people. To treat each other in a descent way. To work hard, to learn, to be honest, to not fool around enough to get in any trouble. The usual stuff. It’s valuable. It’s really important. But it’s not all God to has to say to us.

Samuel’s Mom, Hannah, spoke regularly with God, and God in turn heard what she had to say and responded to her. It’s a tough story. She wanted a baby so badly that she promised God if she had one that the child would belong to God. You get the gist as we read the story. Sometime around the age of 12 or 13

or maybe younger, Hannah takes this boy she fought so hard with God to get and gives him back. She, as per their agreement takes young Samuel to the temple where he becomes the personal assistant to the old priest Eli.

As our story begins, it is night. Not too late because the lamp, which was lit at sundown and ran out of fuel by midnight, was still burning. And Samuel, good boy that he is and used to getting up in the night to take care of old Eli, hears a voice that after a few attempts, he realizes is God speaking to him. God goes on to outline a plan for the life of Samuel. A life that will make hanging out in a cold, dark temple seem easy.

So what does God have to say to all of us – in this holy place? Here's the deal, even in church, even in a place it would seem that God should speak all the time, even when occasionally you hear something that's read, preached or sung, that makes you go 'hmm' what was that? Hearing isn't enough.

Here's a secret that we preachers aren't supposed to tell. Kind of like a magician is sworn to keep the magic trick a secret. It's not enough to just be here, although these days we rejoice when you are, it's not enough to just hear -- we need to listen. We need to open up our minds, our hearts, our ears to be available to God's calling voice. Hearing is one thing. It's kind of easy. Listening and responding. That's something else. That's the tough part.

Which leads us to story number two. Meet Philip and Nathaniel. Philip is all excited, he was stoked. He had found out about Jesus and the word on Jesus was that he was the one. He was the one people had been hoping for and talking

about for a thousand years. He was the one God was sending into the world.

Now if you see or hear about the one being close enough to reach out and touch what do you do? Most of us, whip out our phones and text, tweet, instagram, or snap chat our friends and family. Facebook is too slow. Forget email. This is so good you may even use this thing to make a call.

Back then Philip does what he does when he wants his best friend Nathaniel to know – he runs and finds him. At first Nathaniel has doubts and says, “can anything good come out of Nazareth?” But Philip is so excited that he convinces his friend who says, ‘come on, let’s go see him.’ And they do. And when you get there Jesus has this conversation with Nathaniel about seeing him under the fig tree, that blows him away. And he believes. And declares Jesus to be the son of God, the king of Israel.

Now, when God finally gets Samuel’s attention God says, "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle." This is news of a thing so good it will make your ears tingle. That will make your ears come alive. And Jesus in response to Nathaniel’s declaration says, “You will see greater things than these."

In other words, friends of all ages....God has something to say to us. God has a word for us in our living. We need a word from the lord. And we need to listen. But listening is hard. It takes tremendous concentration. It takes tremendous desire. Far too many things keep us from hearing God’s voice from the day to day circumstances of our living to the constant drone of what is

happening in our world. Sometimes we are just too busy or too distracted to focus on God.

Sometimes it's just difficult to believe, like Samuel, that God could actually be speaking to us. Or like Nathaniel, that anything good can come from Nazareth. People thought in the 60's that nothing good could come from a black preacher in the deep south preaching a gospel of non-violence and a hope for all God's people coming together to answer the same call to civility and unity. But people finally heard the message of God spoken through Martin Luther King, Jr.

God is not and will not be silent in the world today – unless we are the agents of that silence. Unless we allow our chosen way of life, our play, our politics, our pursuit of things before people, to silent our God who wishes to speak through us. But calling isn't easy. It isn't easy to hear, listen to, or follow. It wasn't easy for Samuel. Read 1st and 2nd Samuel. And it wasn't easy for Philip, Nathaniel and all those who hear, listen, follow and become disciples of Jesus.

Sometimes we, in the night or in the light of day, sitting in a sanctuary in worship or out living our lives may find ourselves confronted by, having to deal with an Epiphany. God calls. God calls the hard fought for son of a righteous woman. God calls fishermen, right off of the boat. God calls people to be and do what God needs. God calls whoever God wants or needs. God calls us.

Listen to the words of the anthem sung a few minutes ago. This hymn, began as a poem, as most do, by William Alexander Percy who lived in Mississippi during the post World War 1 rise of deep seeded racism in the deep

south. He was Roman Catholic by faith which didn't make him popular with many. He was an educated man who sought to understand and fight against racism from a more intellectual point of view. That, too, made him suspect in a world in which education was suspect. And he was a homosexual. The announcement of which in the early 20's would have assured him of the derision of most and probably more. But the thing that makes him remembered, was that he was called by God. He heard and he listened. He felt the deep call to speak up against a system that sought to subjugate a whole people because of the color of their skin.

Somewhere along the way he wrote this hymn. He wrote it because he knew that the call of God wasn't easy. But it was vital.

"They cast their nets in Galilee Just off the hills of brown Such happy simple fisherfolk -- Before the Lord came down

Contented peaceful fishermen Before they ever knew The peace of God That fill'd their hearts Brimful -- and broke them too.

Young John who trimmed the flapping sail, Homeless, in Patmos died. Peter, who hauled the teeming net, Head-down was crucified.

The peace of God, it is no peace, But strife closed in the sod, Yet, brothers, pray for but one thing-- The marvelous peace of God."

Who is willing to be a disciple today? To cast their nets? To give up, our agenda, our pride, our selves for God? Who will sing the songs of praise, who will speak the words of welcome to the strangers in our living, who will share the

words of kindness with those who need to know something besides harsh reality, who will offer words of welcome to people in the not so lovely and poor nations of the world, who will give words of forgiveness for those who have in reality or only in our imaginations wronged us, words of justice, words of hope, words of peace, words of love -- for all of God's people, not just for some?

We need to hear a word from God today? But if we decide what that word looks like, what it sounds like, what it is – then it rarely comes. God's word is an ear tingling, too good to be true, you haven't seen anything yet kind of word....or just a word of assurance....just a word of joy...just a word of comfort....just a word that brings peace and quiet to the cacophony in which we live....

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