

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Preached Sunday, January 14, 2018 – Parkminster United Church

We are constantly in conversation, aren't we? In this age of social media, conversations happen around us 24/7. If you're not receiving text after text, it's the constant updating of Facebook statuses, tweets, or Instagram posts. Whether we like it or not, we hear the voices of the world calling to us. Just looking at the front page of a newspaper these days puts me in an ethical conversation with the headlines.

The voices of the world call us into conversation with our own values, our sense of hope, and our concern for society.

The voices of those around us call us into conversation. Each human voice makes a claim on us; each asserts the truth of its own sound. All the voices around us assert the truth of relationship and call us into some accountability for our relationship to the owner of the voice.

We hear also the voices of our own desires-sometimes the voice of self-doubt and self-condemnation, or the voice of our failures, our shortcomings, our mistakes. We hear the voice of our loneliness, our yearning, our longing. We hear too the voices of deep joy, contentment, wonder, gratitude, and awe.

We could say we are constantly in conversation-with culture and the activities going on around us, with the people we relate to in our everyday lives, and within ourselves.

As people of faith, we can also say we are in constant conversation with God.

In our reading this morning, the boy Samuel heard a voice and began a conversation with God. Thank goodness for Eli who had probably been following a voice inside his own head for a lifetime, or the young Samuel might have missed a prophetic calling for justice and love and a lifetime of ministry on behalf of his people.

Have you heard the voice of God calling you? The story of Samuel suggests that God's word was rare at that time and visions were infrequent. In our time, we fear mistaking the Divine voice for just another human sound; there are so many noises in our world competing for our attention. We tend not to trust the cacophony around us, but it can be difficult to be still and know that God is speaking our name.

We take a big risk when we dare to believe that God is calling our name, trying to get our attention. The Scriptures are filled with folks who heard God calling their names. Remember Sarah, Isaac, Joseph, Esther, and all those Hebrew Prophets. Samuel was called into a lifetime of service and obedience on behalf of his people. Jesus called a motley group of folks into itinerant service by calling their names along the shore at Galilee.

The voice of God calls us too. Amid all the other voices of our lives, we listen for and desire to hear the divine voice.

I often wonder, when I have a sleepless night, if I really need to be sleeping or if my soul needs, literally, to have a dark night. I also wonder how many of you are up and wandering about in your own homes on some of these dark nights. Just as the body and mind have work to do, so does that mystical region of our awareness,

the human soul. I have long since stopped trying to beat myself to sleep when one of these nights comes. I have learned to listen for a voice, to listen for the patient voice of God who keeps speaking my name over and over, until I release my attention and turn to God for a conversation.

It's a risk when we dare to believe that God is calling our name, trying to get our attention. Samuel was called to a lifetime of service by a voice and a conversation in the night.

A voice calling common, ordinary seekers to follow, take a risk, begin a conversation which will change the face of the world forever . . .

How do we know that it is truly the voice of God calling in our own lives? How else, except to do as the characters do in today's scripture—we take a risk and venture forth by faith. We begin by daring to believe that a loving God can call us by name and invites us to come and see.

There is a less theological way of saying this, if the word “calling” sounds a bit bewildering to you this morning. At the still center of our being, there is a promise, a potential that shapes us and shapes the sound and form of our future. Something is calling me, the voice of the future, it is not my destiny or fate, but it is the world into which I am coming. When modern psychology talks about the search for meaning and purpose it is one way of getting at the question of the intention or purpose of an individual life. As followers of a spirit filled path, we can say it another way, we are called into the future by a resonating voice deep within.

The United States celebrates and remembers Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. this weekend. King heard a voice that called him to speak to his nation against racism, prejudice and unconstitutional segregation. God gave to him a prophetic voice and a vision that allowed him to minister to the conscience of a country and he demanded a wake-up call for millions. He pursued his calling with relentless compassion, vigor and faith.

In his sermon, “Our God is Able,” King tells the story of a conversation with God in which he hears an inner voice calling him into being.

He says that it had been a particularly strenuous day and he had settled into bed at a late hour. The phone rang and an angry voice on the line said, “...we’ve taken all we want from you. Before next week you’ll be sorry you ever came to Montgomery.”

King hung up, but could not go back to sleep.

He writes, “in a state of exhaustion, with my courage almost gone, I determined to take the problem to God. My head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud. The words I spoke to God that night are vivid in my memory; “I am here, taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength or courage, they too, will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I’ve come to a point where I can’t face them alone.”

At that moment, King experienced the presence of the Divine. An inner voice came forth. At that moment, his fears began to pass and his uncertainty evaporated. He writes that God gave him an inner calm to go forward.

King trusted God’s call in the innermost parts of his being. In the ancient words, we hear King’s response, “Speak God, your servant is listening.”

How can we listen for God in the midst of the noise of this life?

What might we hear in a midst of the distractions of a demanding and often confusing world?

Is there a word under all the words for this congregation as we face a new and different future in 2018?

Where are we being called? On whose behalf?

The calling arises out of the core of our being and the imprint on our spirits; “You are my beloved, in you I am well pleased.” The Word comes as our call to do the work of truth, righteousness, and justice in God’s world—and God knows there are more than enough justice issues to go around. Global and neighborhood poverty, human trafficking, the power of racism and gender inequality, inequities in opportunity, relationships with First People, all are cries for justice calling our names. Then Word comes out of a thousand dark nights and speaks our name to call us in the future and into our essential calling, “Samuel, Samuel, Samuel.” Martin, and you can add your name right here.

God’s love for us is persistent. Even when it is hard to hear, God is guiding us now. Our deepest vocation arises out of Psalmist’s words, “You have searched me and known me, you know when I sit down and when I rise up, you discern my thoughts from far away. Even before a word is on my tongue, you know it completely.”

Vocation is the voice calling to us in the depth of our being, to be, to become what we were created to be, to fulfill the promise and potentiality that is the divine spark—the immanent spirit of God.

Be still. Listen. The voice of God is calling. Thanks be to God.

Amen.