

This week's Worship at Home was prepared by **Barb Finlay** – Rev. Joanne's sister, for Sheridan United Church. It is offered here as a gift to her and to Applewood.

As always, you may wish to read through the whole service, stopping to link to music videos, or just choose some elements of the service.

With thanks to Barb,

Rev. Joanne

Second after Epiphany, January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Opening Prayer:

O God, you are constantly present in our lives and in the world, like a lamp burning through the night. Reveal yourself to us and through us. Tune our hearts and minds to recognize your bright calling to us to live in ways that reflect your steadfast love. Amen

Prayers for All Seasons – Year B

Centering Music: I the Lord of Sea and Sky

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcXOkht8w7c>

Prayer of Confession & Assurance of Forgiveness:

God of night-whispered wisdom,  
forgive us for the times  
we fail to seek your will or heed your call.  
Forgive us when we fail to act on the truth we know,  
the knowledge we have, the possibilities there is for change.  
Forgive us when we let our love  
for family or friends or church or nation  
blind us to their faults - and ours.

Know that you are forgiven and freed to forgive others.  
Walk into the future shaped not by failures,  
but by God's justice and mercy. Amen.

Prayers for All Seasons – Year B

Prayer for Illumination:

O God, wisdom incarnate,  
Call us once to get our attention.  
Call us twice to make sure we are awake,  
Call us three times to have us wonder what is needed,  
Call us to hear your word, and to be your willing student. Amen

Scripture: 1 Samuel 3: 1-20

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.

At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; 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. Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!"<sup>[a]</sup> and he said, "Here I am!" 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. 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." Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. 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. 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.

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. On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God,<sup>[b]</sup> and he did not restrain them. Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering forever."

Samuel lay there until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." He said, "Here I am." Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also, if you hide anything from me of all that he told you." 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."

As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the LORD.

Reflection:

I usually write my reflection on the gospel reading or an epistle, but today I want to take a look at the reading from Samuel.

This is one of my favorite lessons of the Hebrew Bible, and it really makes me laugh. Not in a disrespectful way, but in a kind of knowing way, where you chuckle and say: "that's so true."

The thing that is so true about this story is the number of times God has to call Samuel. The first is understandable, as Samuel is caring for Eli. If he is awakened by someone calling him, it just makes sense that it would be Eli. The second time, Samuel still mistakes the voice of God for Eli calling out to him. Again, Eli sets him straight and sends him back to bed.

The third time it just seems like God is pranking Samuel. Even Eli seems to understand that something is going on, so he tells Samuel how to answer God the next time he is called. This time Samuel responds to God's call and God reveals his intentions for the House of Eli.

There is no good news for Eli, and Samuel relays the prophecy with him and Eli is resigned to his fate.

Samuel grew up with the Lord and the Lord was with him and all of Israel know Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord.

How many times have you been called by God, but assumed it was someone or something else?

Unfortunately, I do not seem to any better as discerning a call from God than our friend Samuel. I am embarrassed to tell you how many times God has to call me to do what is required of me. If you think God is trying to tell you something, it was probably not the first attempt.

In my own experience, God calls me at the most awkward or inconvenient times. When I am already busy doing something, I will think of something else I can do to reach out to others. When I don't have very much money, God will move me to give up something to help others. When my patience for my fellow human beings is at the breaking point, God will require me to be a little kinder still.

There are some tips (or life hacks) that I use to determine if it is God who is calling me to do something:

1. Will it benefit someone?
2. Will it ease suffering?
3. Does it push me outside my comfort zone?
4. Will I learn something new about myself or others?

Answering "yes" to these questions might mean I am being called.

I believe that God calls us all the time, but in our fast paced, multi-tasking, distracted lives, we either do not hear, or put off answering those calls.

That is OK, God will call back. But at some point we have to respond, "Speak, your servant is listening."

Think about some of the ways God is calling you and how you can turn that call into living and loving service.

Music: Lord Speak to Me

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvYSoGP7pwM>

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Concern:

Loving God, thank you for calling us.

You have provided us with the gifts of creation and your love.

We offer our prayers for those who need to listen for your call.

For world leaders and church leaders, may they work for all humankind

And for the health of our planet.

We pray for our own church community that we answer your call to care for others.

We ask that those who are feeling lonely and isolated know your embrace.

For those who are sick and suffering illness of any kind, be their constant companion.

For those who have suffered loss of loved ones or circumstances, comfort them.

We ask this in Jesus name, who taught us to call you:

Our Father, who art in heaven

hallowed be thy name, thy Kingdom come

thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us,

and lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the Kingdom,

the power and the glory,

forever and ever. Amen

Closing Music: Open My Eyes That I May See

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PtOE84tRhhc>

Sending Forth:

Let us go out into the world looking for the good,

Let us go out into the world feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Let us go out into the world behaving as a follower of Jesus.

Let us go into the world listening for God's call.