

**2nd SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**  
**January 14, 2018**

Text: 1 Samuel 3:1-10

Theme: Your Servant is Listening

God actually spoke to me. There is no doubt in my mind that it was God. I heard the words clearly and succinctly as if God (himself) was standing right there in front of me. And this is how it happened:

It was a little after five-thirty in the morning when God moved me out of bed. I got dressed and sat in another room to pray. And as I prayed God said – *Come and see what I have done.*

In that very moment (at that very place) (in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century) God spoke to me with absolute authority. I paused to let it sink in. Time seemed to stop because God was near. God had me in his sights and God had something to say to me. And then God continued to speak and I listened to his every word.

So recounts the chancellor of Bethlehem College when he heard the voice of God on March 19, 2007. The voice of God recounted all the awesome deeds that God had done in history, and it ended with an assurance that God will continue to care for his people and watch over them. He heard the voice of God two weeks after his father passed away and it moved him out of his despair. It moved him to write his next book entitled –

*When the Darkness Will Not Lift:*

*Doing What We Can While We Wait for God*

Our Old Testament lesson is one of my favorites because it offers us an excellent opportunity to struggle with one of our deepest desires ... which is to physically hear the voice of God. Scripture is filled with all these wonderful stories of God coming to people. God tells them exactly what they are to do. God brings them words that console them on the darkest of days. And many of us want that for ourselves. We just want God to come and speak to us with that same clarity.

But does God really do that anymore?

And then we hear experiences like the one I just shared (and there are many others) and it raises new questions for us.

How can we be certain that it is the voice of God calling us?

What if the voice we heard was simply our own voice?

It could just be an idea that popped into our heads out of nowhere.

Those questions are not dissimilar to the ones we heard from Samuel. Samuel heard the voice but did not recognize it as coming from God. It took his mentor, Eli, some time to realize what was happening and then he counseled Samuel to listen and obey. Eli knew the voice because of his own experiences and he also knew that Samuel was adequately equipped to do whatever God was asking of him.

But I am not interested in sharing with you this morning story after story of the least likely candidates (like Samuel or the president of a college) who heard the voice of God and then went on to do extraordinary works in the name of our Lord.

I am interested, however, in encouraging each of us to recognize that God speaks to us (individually and as a community of faith). It just may be the case that the voice is not as loud or as clear and we may be missing it altogether.

When I stand in this pulpit and look at you, this is what I see:

Some of you ...

are the primary caregivers for loved ones

are taking the lead on our adult mission trips

teach in our schools / teach our Faith Formation classes

work in government positions / work from home

advocate for people who are most vulnerable

nurture and encourage others through kind words / loving acts

volunteer in hospice care facilities and hospitals

come here on Tuesday mornings to pray

Why do we do these things?

Where did those ideas come from?

I could stand here all morning and list all that we do because we are the called people of God. We hear his voice and we respond. Even at a time in our history when we believe the world is no longer tuned into the voice of God, we believe that God is still speaking to us and God is still calling us.

But (you are quick to say) that is all well and good but ...

I want to know the direct path to take in my life.

I want to know the will of God for me.

I want it / to be as clear / as it was for that chancellor.

And let me be very clear. We hear that concrete voice every single time we open up our Bibles. For example, all we have to do is look in Scripture and observe how God approached his people.

God would reach out and have these conversations which included an invitation to do something on his behalf. But often the people backed away because they felt ill-prepared for the task. They were too young or too old. They did not have the correct words. No one would believe them. But the invitation stretched their imaginations.

It is in / what we learn about these encounters others had with God / that we learn what we are capable of doing. We may not be trained to be a caregiver but when called upon we will do it because our love for others far exceeds our lack of ability. We may not know the first thing about putting a lesson plan together for a Faith Formation class but that does not mean we cannot teach our children the tenets of our faith.

And for those of us who want a specific *to do* list, I invite us to keep our Bibles open and concentrate on the *Ten Commandments*. We are called to be obedient to God so there is no better place to start. And if we feel sufficiently adept at all ten directives then we can move on to the other mandates given to us in the gospels that invite us to follow the example of our Lord and Savior. It is in / what we learn about these encounters others had with Christ / that leads us to initiate mission trips and to nurture others with love and kindness.

For those of us who want a specific job to do (like Samuel), I invite us to open our Bibles and read all of Chapter 3. Samuel served the Lord at a time when all the people were exceptionally disobedient. So what Samuel first heard from God was a powerful word of judgment against Eli and his sons, words which fell to this young boy to deliver. It is in / what we learn about the encounter Samuel had with God / that gives us the courage to advocate for the most vulnerable.

I am confident that everyone is called by God. I am confident that the things we do are because we hear the voice of God ...

whether it is to do something monumental

or to do a given task for a specific period of time

or to deliver a message that is not popular but bears the truth

Once the chancellor shared his profound personal encounter with God he also sent out this message: There is no greater time in our history for people to be listening for the voice of God. And in his estimation we should not wait for that voice to come at 5:30 am. We have access to that voice now in the inspired word of God (the Bible).

Do not wait to start on the path that seems right to you. I promise you that if it is the will of God you will know soon enough. Sometimes the only way we can know for sure is to begin.

Starting is a sign of hope.

Making a beginning is a statement of belief.

We remember the words of Martin Luther King Jr:

Faith is taking the first step ...

even when we do not see the whole staircase

God is always a step ahead of us. God calls us into our neighborhoods, into the world, into dimly lit places where the word of the Lord is rare. Do not believe for one moment that God has never spoken to you. Listen carefully you servants of God. Amen