

2 Pentecost  
Christ and Grace  
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1 Samuel 3:1-20  
June 3, 2018

Mark 2:23 – 3:6

Sometimes, when we are in church, someone's phone will ring, or quack like a duck, or play a great song. This happens because we are blessed with technology and because we are also forgetful and we don't remember to silence our phones. It's happened here once or twice, and if it was your phone, please know that God forgives you and it amuses me more than bothers me. But I also need to tell you that every time it happens, I am so tempted to stop in the middle of the sermon or liturgy and say, "It's God calling, answer the phone!"

Our reading from the Book of First Samuel is one of many "call narratives" in the Bible, stories about individuals who received a call from God. Just last week, we heard the dramatic story of the Prophet Isaiah in the temple, having both a visual and auditory experience of God's call. "Who will go for us? Whom shall I send?" and Isaiah responded with those familiar words, "Here I am. Send me!"

So when we think about this idea of being called by God, we often recall these stories of famous calls and think we would never be called like that – some of us even pray we won't be! But I want to explore the idea of being called by God simply by virtue of our baptism, and our relationship with God, which are both based in the idea that we have been marvelously made, as the psalmist says, we are a wonderful work, and God's hand is upon us. We have been created by God for a purpose.

And if we believe this then we need to expect that we will indeed be called by God, because I believe that God calls us over and over, every day, from one moment to the next. God calls us to live our lives in the way Jesus modeled for us, responding to everything that happens in our world with a response of love, compassion, and justice.

How do we know what God is calling us to do? How do we hear God's call?

If you really want to hear God speak to you (and maybe you don't), be attentive to what is going on all around you. Look for places where God is already at work and join in. Another way to hear God is to be still, and you will need to be quiet. I know that is hard for some of us!

Our days are full of noise. Someone is talking, the tv or radio drones in the background, our electronic devices are constantly demanding our attention. Episcopal priest and author, Barbara Brown Taylor suggests that we refuse to be quiet because we're afraid God won't have anything to say in the silence. But more often, she suspects, what we're afraid of is that God will have something to say.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *When God Is Silent*, The 1997 Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1998), 51.

We can listen for God in lots of ways – in prayer and meditation, by reading scripture, through sermons, hymns, choir anthems. We can hear God speaking to us through others – whether they are close family and friends, perfect strangers, or even the most annoying people in our lives.

Call or vocation is not always and only about being a prophet, or being ordained, or even having some amazing gift that you share in church to give glory to God. More often than not, call is simply following Jesus. Preaching the Gospel by example. Loving your neighbor.

At other times, call is about doing the hard things, the things we would rather not do. Sometimes God calls us to acknowledge an uncomfortable truth - to hear this uncomfortable truth ourselves or to speak it to another. Samuel was called to speak an uncomfortable truth to Eli. Thankfully, Eli's faithfulness helped him hear this truth and then trust that God would help him with the hard things that lay ahead.

In our Gospel reading, when Jesus allowed his disciples to pluck the heads of the grain and when he healed the man with the withered hand, both on the Sabbath, the religious authorities accused him of breaking the laws of the Sabbath. And Jesus responded with a question... is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath? To save life or to kill? If people are hungry, shouldn't we feed them? If they are not well, shouldn't we heal them? Isn't that the Sabbath thing to do? Jesus was calling them to hear an uncomfortable truth, the truth that if we interpret a law such that people go unfed or are not healed, then we are not fulfilling the purpose for which God created us – to love one another.

It hit too close to home, not because the religious authorities were bad people, but precisely because they were good people who loved God and wanted to do all the right things according to the law. But the Pharisees were unable to hear an uncomfortable truth. And when Jesus called them and they could not, would not answer, when they remained silent, he looked around at them with anger, he was grieved at their hardness of heart.

I have to confess to you that when I read these words earlier in the week - the part where Jesus looked at them with anger, where he was grieved at their hardness of heart, it brought me up short. It hurt my heart as I thought about all that is going on in our nation and in the world right now. I felt called to examine the uncomfortable truths I am silent about and I am wondering if I am making Jesus angry, if I might be grieving Jesus with my hardness of heart. And then I wondered... Can I trust God to help me respond to the call to hear my own uncomfortable truths?

Church can be the place where we respond to God's call, day by day, and moment by moment, as we try on different ministries, and learn how to be better disciples. Church is where we find support to respond to injustice and collaborate together to love our neighbors in concrete, life affirming ways. And a church mission statement is one of the ways a church defines its call. Our mission statement is this: Christ & Grace – offering hope, healing, and hospitality.

I will be spending some time this summer thinking and praying about our mission statement. I invite you to join me. I want to be in conversation with you about how you hear God calling us to put our mission statement into action. How are we responding as a church to what Jesus is

calling us to do? How is Jesus calling us to make disciples and love our neighbors in this community?

Friends, we have been called to hope, healing, and hospitality. Let's wonder together about what that might look like. I have a feeling that we had better get used to God calling us, over and over. God will not stop calling us, will not stop loving us, because we were created for a purpose.

And if the phone rings, it's God calling – answer the phone!