

Come and See; Stop and Listen
Rev. Nicole Farley
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
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1 Samuel 3:1-10

¹Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

²At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³the 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. ⁴Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" ⁵and 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. ⁶The 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." ⁷Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸The 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. ⁹Therefore 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.

¹⁰Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

John 1:43-51

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵Philip 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." ⁴⁶Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." ⁴⁹Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹And 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."

Samuel, for whom two books of the Bible are named, had quite a future ahead of him beyond today's reading. He became, first and foremost, a prophet to the people, as well as a judge of the people, following after his mentor about whom we read, the priest, Eli. Eli had been a good man of God once but he had gotten lazy and greedy and his sons, who were also priests, were even worse. They would take for themselves great portions of the people's offerings, far more than was permitted and leaving far less than what the Lord asked, and they would abuse their power in other ways, as well. Eli pled with them to change their ways but could not convince them.

So, when we read, "the word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread," I have to wonder. The Israelites believed God stayed away when they were being especially disobedient;

when the priests themselves were guilty, it must have seemed only logical that God stayed away because of their behavior. But I would venture another theory. It still has to do with the fact that Eli and his sons were not doing any justice to their roles as priests. Among the many ways in which they were *not* serving God by serving God's people, I suspect they were not reminding the people to look and listen for God.

We believe that God didn't simply create the world and walk away. God's love for us keeps God in relationship with us. God is still very much active in the world. God is still creating. We see ongoing creation in the budding of trees and flowers and in the life of a newborn and in the opportunities that seem to rise out of nowhere. God is still sustaining. When there is hope despite the odds, when a single parent meets the demands of parenting and working and sick children and sick selves and extracurricular activities day after day after day, when this earth continues to put forth blooms despite the increasing damage we do, God is sustaining. And God is still redeeming. Every time good comes forth from bad, every time a person turns her life around, every time we remember humility in light of God's greatness, God is redeeming.

We know that God can be found. We live in a time when believers understand that our faith involves actively looking and listening. Eli, as a priest and a prophet, knew to listen for God. Perhaps it was because he was out of practice that he didn't realize right away that it was the Lord calling Samuel. Eventually, though, he recognized, perhaps remembered, what it sounded like when the Lord spoke and, for the first time in a long time, he acted in a way that found favor with the Lord.

Nathanael, from our reading in John, was from a time more like ours. He and his fellow Jews, particularly tired of oppression from Rome, were watching and waiting for the Messiah, someone to deliver Israel and, they believed, make it great again. They studied and studied again the words of the prophets to discern what might be the signs that the Messiah had come. From what they pieced together, they developed pictures of what a Messiah might look like and how he might behave. Of course, they had varying opinions, which caused great debate among them.

What their expectations held in common was that they were all so far off from envisioning who this Savior King would be and what he would do to redeem them. So when Nathanael says, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" he is not mocking Philip. He is expressing that his understanding of who this savior would be does not involve Nazareth. Rather than argue against his theological interpretation, Philip does the only thing that could convince Nathanael otherwise. "Come and see," he says.

We, too, get so convinced that we know how God is going to work in the world that we can miss God actually working in the world. We believe we know what God is saying, and has said, so we forget to listen for a new word. But God is persistent, thank heavens, and God is consistent, always acting in

the world. Some of you may have come across a book published about 15 years ago, called *Small Miracles*. The preface was written by Dr. Bernie Siegel, the author of *Love, Medicine and Miracles* and he tells the story of a patient of his visiting another doctor's office and waiting in the waiting room. He says:

The doctor was running late, and the waiting room was crowded with irate people. After an hour had passed, several of them rose from their seats and left. My patient was tempted to do the same but something stopped him. All through the next hour, he kept glancing at his watch, wondering if it wouldn't be wiser, after all, for him to get up and leave. Finally, after two full hours had passed, the nurse came into the room and called out, "Kirimedjian!"

He jumped to his feet, but saw to his surprise that across the room, another man had also risen at the summons. Both men stared at each other in shock, because the name is extremely odd and unusual, and what was the likelihood of two men bearing the same uncommon name being in the same doctor's waiting room at the same time? Curious about the man's identity, my patient approached him and discovered...his father, whom he hadn't seen in twenty-two years! His mother had gotten divorced when he was a young child. At that time his father had been an alcoholic and abusive parent, and as a result hadn't been given any visitation rights at all.

Kirimedjian grew up never knowing his father at all, to the extent that he didn't even know what he looked like, until that moment in the doctor's waiting room! Now, here's the rub: If my patient had given in to his impulse to leave, he never would have met his father! But because he allowed himself to "go with the flow" and waited, a reconciliation with his father was able to take place.¹

Speaking on this coincidence, as some might call it, and anything else that fits under that category, Dr. Siegel says, "I believe that *nothing* is a 'coincidence.' It's all part of creation and God's plan and our response. We just have to be open to seeing it. We have to want to see it and participate in creation...If you stay rooted in the intellect only, and disregard the spiritual aspects of life, you won't have [these coincidences]."² If we do not stop and listen, God's word for us can get swallowed up in the cacophony of everyday life. If we are not watching for God to come in unexpected ways, we may write them off as ordinary when God's breaking in is anything but ordinary.

The word of the Lord is *not* rare in these days. Visions *are* widespread. We know that God can be found but sometimes we forget. Just as we can arrive at a destination and not remember passing the usual landmarks because our minds were elsewhere, the same can happen in our faith. If we're not

¹ Siegel, Dr. Bernie. *Small Miracles* (Adams Media Corporation: Holbrook, MA; 1997), vii-viii.

² Ibid. iv, v.

paying attention, Easter will be here and we won't have noticed the ordinary time in between. So pay attention. Each day, ask yourself, "Where did I see or experience God?" Don't try to guess what God will say and look like. Just be ready that you might see or hear God around every turn. Come and see; stop and listen.

Let us pray: Lord, may we hear your word so frequently that it become commonplace and may we see you in the world around us so often that your visage become familiar. Amen.