

## **It's All in the Call**

I Samuel 3:1-20; I Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20; Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18 1-25-09

I know we have all heard about the call of the disciples many, many times. We have heard how Jesus simply approached people, asked them to follow him and that they walked away from the lives they knew into a future they did not understand.

From these stories we know that Jesus had great charisma. He was a magnet for some people who desperately wanted and needed to hear his message. It was a difficult time in his world--a time of spiritual and moral confusion. He appeared bringing a message of hope, a message of change.

Some followed because they believed he was a political messiah, one who would overthrow the Roman rule under which they struggled. Others were not quite sure why they followed—there was just something about him that encouraged them forward. We may be sure that there were some who joined him and who later left him disappointed that he did not do just what they had hoped he would do. This often happens to those who choose to lead. It is just a fact of life. As a wise old friend used to tell me, “They crucify their leaders, you know.” He was right.

Then, there is the story of God’s call to Samuel. I have always loved this story. I have been fascinated by the way Samuel hesitated, not quite sure who it was that was speaking to him.

I admire his mentor, Eli, for helping him discern and understand that he, Samuel, was to be dedicated to the service of God. Samuel’s mother, Hannah, had made a bargain with God. She told God, that if she could have a child, she would place him in God’s service.

So, Samuel’s life was determined before he was even conceived. When God started to call Samuel, he wasn’t quite sure what was going on. When he accepted the call our stories about him tell us that he became solid in his belief in God and faithful in what God asked of him.

Most people, when they sense a call from God, are hesitant. Most often when a call comes, there is not a voice speaking loudly. Instead there is a stirring, a restlessness, a search for something. This process can take a long time. All a person knows is that there is something out there that is dragging him or her in another direction and disturbing the life that person has come to know. If the person being called is pretty good at being dense, the process might take years before he or she gives in.

I am one of the dense ones. I was sure God wanted the young fellow next door and had just gotten the address wrong. It took two years before I even asked friends what they thought was wrong with me. They told me, as gently as they could, in the manner of Eli, that I was probably being called into ministry. At that point I thought that they, all men in seminary, were pretty dense. I had never seen a female minister. “Well,” they reminded me, “Congregationalists were the first to ordain a woman in the 1800s,” and the seminaries they attended were “full of women.”

I reminded them that I had never met Antoinette Brown or any woman in ministry or in seminary. I told them that the ordained ministry was never an option for women revealed to us in our church.

And it wasn't. The prospect of a woman in ministry was something foreign to my Congregational church, which was very conservative politically while progressive theologically.

You cannot imagine the obstacles, even barricades that were put in my way when I told our senior pastor that I believed I was being called into ministry. He thought I was joking. The congregation, bless its collective heart, was very supportive when it learned of my call; the leadership of the church was not.

And, yet, I endured three years of commuting 220 miles round trip three days each week to seminary in Chicago leading to my ordination almost twenty-five years ago. And I ended up on your doorstep almost seven years ago on a Super Bowl Sunday when the Patriots won. I have never had any regrets.

I am now one of the old women in the National Association, one of the ones the younger women like to approach cautiously and bombard with questions. Of course, this makes me laugh. I have not done anything grand, I do not intend to do so. I just believe in living a life of service to God and I want to show others the doors they might open to a better relationship with their Creator and with their fellow humans.

In opening those doors we all find that we all are being called in different ways and at different times. Through hearing the call and answering it, we learn that we are not being told to simply serve ourselves. There is a cause bigger than we are that and we need to take action to support and maintain it. We learn that this world is not all about "me," it is about "us." As some are fond of saying, "There is no "i" in the word "team." We are all in this thing called "life" together and we need to find common pathways to travel.

Perhaps, at first, those pathways seem small and insignificant in the places we live and move and have our beings. But, in learning to walk the pathways of patience and love and forgiveness and kindness in our own families and communities we discover a broadening way that leads to a clearer vision for our country and the world.

We may become disappointed and feel discouraged from time to time, but we discover that there is a flame of hope that burns deep within us that encourages us forward step by step and inch by inch until we come to a place of positive and enduring change.

This was the way Jesus tried to lead those who followed him— steadily into the light of a new and better way of being and doing.

This is the way we are all asked to continue on his journey of love. When we begin to be bold and brave enough to hear God calling us, and when we have the courage to respond, "Here I am, Lord, is it I Lord, I have heard you calling in the night. I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart," then we will have continued the circle of a fulfilling life begun so very long ago.

*-- Amen*