

Second Sunday of Ordinary Time

Speak Lord

January 14, 2018

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We begin ordinary time with two stories of being called by God. In the first reading we hear the story of the call of Samuel. Samuel is asleep in the temple, before the ark of the covenant, when he hears his name called out. Naturally he thinks it is Eli who has summoned him. But after Samuel was woken him from a sound sleep a couple of times, Eli tells Samuel that it's the Lord who is calling him, and that he should listen up. Now is this the fruit of Eli's own familiarity with the Lord, or his way of getting Samuel out of his hair and getting a good nights sleep. Parents? What do you think?

In any case, Samuel leaves Eli again and when he is awoken again by the sound of his name, he obeys Eli and says "Speak Lord, your servant is listening." And so begins Samuel's life as a prophet of the Lord. Whether Eli was serious or simply trying to get Samuel out of hair, the result is that Samuel does hear the Lord in that voice in the night, and he is not the same again.

In the gospel we hear the story of the calling of the first apostles this time in the person of John the Baptist who points beyond himself to this new prophet they have encountered, Jesus. The two feel drawn to this man they have just met, and their current master, John, remarkably tells them to check him out, to follow their attraction, even if it means leaving him behind. Jesus responds by inviting them to spend time with him and check him out. "Come and see."

How about us? Have we had such an experience, a feeling of being drawn to someone, that has ended up changing our lives. Have we too felt called? Priests and religious are said to follow a calling. In Catholicism we use the Latin and talk about some having a "vocation" from vocare, to call. Luther preached that everyone has a calling, we are all called to ministry, through serving others, whether through our

job, or even without being paid for it, and through falling in love, getting married and raising a family.

One of my old mentors, an immigrant philosophy professor from Croatia, used to ask candidates in job interviews. "So, you want to be a professor. What do you profess?" I ask something similar of my students. I help them to discern not simply not simply what kind of job they want, as if its all up to them, but do they feel called to do with their lives. I encourage them also to pray "Speak Lord, your servant is listening." Now frequently in the stories of the call of a prophet, the prophet responds by protesting his own unworthiness. "Not me. You do not want me. You do not want to give me that kind of responsibility." We feel we are too frail to be of much use to God, too compromised for God to call us.

But our faith teaches us that God does call us, that God calls each one of us, individually, by name. God does not need superheroes to accomplish his mission, God needs people like you and I, frail, sinful people who know what it is like to be weak and self-centered, angry and frightened. He needs people like us to bring his Gospel to people like us.

This weekend we celebrate the birthday of Martin Luther King, an American prophet, called by God through the voices of the racially oppressed and outcast in our own country. Rev. King said this about "what you don't need", and "all you need":

You don't have to have a college degree to serve.

You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve.

You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve.

You don't have to know the second law of thermodynamics to serve.

Everybody can be great. Because anybody can be of service.

All you need is a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.

May we have hearts that are open, eyes that can see and ears that can hear the stirrings of the spirit of God in our midst..

