

Sunday Sermon
January 14, 2018
I Samuel 3:1-10
John 1:43-51
“The Summons”

Samuel

Hannah, wife of Elkanah, lived sometime in the 12th century before the time of Christ. Hannah was barren. One day, fervently praying in the Temple in Shiloh, Hannah promised God that if God would give her a son, she would give that son back to serve God. So when a son was indeed born to her and he was old enough, she took that son, Samuel, to the Temple to serve as an assistant to the prophet Eli.

The narrative says Eli had grown old and blind, and the story says the great prophet had not heard the voice of God in many days. The Word of God was not coming to Israel, the text says.

And then God spoke to Samuel. We do not know how old Samuel was, probably around 12 or 13. But one night, sleeping on his pallet in the Temple, Samuel heard a voice calling him. He assumed it was Eli in need of something. Why would he have thought it was God? After all, the voice of God had not been heard in many days in Israel.

Three times the voice called, “Samuel! Samuel!” Three times the boy went to Eli saying, “You called?” Finally, Eli said the next time you hear the voice, say, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

So at the next call Samuel answered, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” And the boy heard the call of God in his life, the call of God for his life. And Samuel grew up to become the great judge who would anoint Israel’s first two kings.

We see this scenario throughout the Old Testament. People called by God who do not expect it, do not see themselves as candidates to be called. Yet, God calls them and does great things through them.

Philip and Nathanael

Philip and Nathanael were friends in the first century in the time of Christ. Nathanael lived in Cana, and Philip was a fisherman from Bethsaida. Both were earnest and sincere Jews who, like many in that day, awaited the coming of the Messiah.

One day Philip came to Nathanael and said, “I think we have found the Messiah, the one Moses and the prophets said would someday rise up in Israel to deliver God’s people. “He is Jesus,” Philip said, “the son of Joseph, from Nazareth.” And Nathanael responded, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” You see, Nazareth was a backwoods kind of place.

This week we have heard “Can anything good come from there” talk about certain places. When my friends and I were growing up in West Charlotte, we said that about the town across the river in the next county, a mill town at the time, Mt. Holly. “Do not date boys from Mt. Holly,” we would say. “Nothing good can come out of Mt. Holly.”

Nazareth was that nothing good kind of place. How was it possible for God to raise up the Messiah out of Nazareth, Nathanael wondered. And Philip said to Nathanael, “Come and see.”

When I graduated high school and went to college, I ended up with a roommate from Mt. Holly. She introduced me to her friends, including guys from Mt. Holly. My assumptions changed.

Nathanael went and met Jesus. His assumptions changed. His life changed. We see this scenario throughout the New Testament. People with suppositions, preconceived notions of how the world is and how people are. Then they hear their names called, they meet this one named Jesus, their perceptions transform, their lives take on a new direction, and they are changed forever.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

In 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia, a boy was born into the home of an African American Baptist pastor. Atlanta, Georgia, in 1929 was not the most promising place for the future of an African American. Yet this bright, young man grew up and entered college at the age of fifteen.

He finished Morehouse College in Atlanta in three years. Then he went to Crozer Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania, where he earned a Bachelor of Divinity degree. From there he went on to Boston University and earned a PhD in Systematic Theology.

As he was completing his PhD, Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, was looking for a pastor. Senior Deacon Robert D. Nesbitt lined up Martin Luther King, Jr. to preach a trial sermon. “He is only 25,” the congregation protested. “A boy cannot pastor this church.” But after hearing King preach a couple more times, the congregation voted unanimously to call him.

At that time in Montgomery, Alabama, city buses were the main source of transportation for the African American population. To ride a city bus, people who were black had to pay their fares at the front and then go to the back door of the bus to board and then sit or stand in the back part.

The year after King arrived in Montgomery, a woman named Rosa Parks was arrested when she refused to give up her seat to a white man when all the seats for whites at the front of the bus were filled. Her arrest triggered the Montgomery bus boycott.

King had not felt called to be a civil rights leader. He said he went into the ministry mostly because his father was a pastor, and he always did what Daddy King

wanted him to do. Martin had anticipated a quieter life, perhaps as a college professor. But through an odd, or providential, turn of events, he found himself at the forefront of the civil rights movement with the people calling him to be the leader. King chose a non-violent approach.

One night during the bus boycott, King came home tired, frightened. The phone rang, and an angry voice on the other end said, “We’re gonna get you.” King stood frozen in fear. He wanted to call his father for reassurance and advice. But then he said a voice came to him saying, “Martin, you do what is right. You stand up for justice. I will be with you.”

Later, when the church parsonage was fire bombed and the African American community gathered outside, angry, ready to erupt into violence, King spoke from the parsonage porch, “We are still non-violent. I want you to go home and put away your weapons.” The crowd listened and obeyed.

After a boycott of 385 days, a U.S. District Court ruling ended racial segregation on Montgomery buses. Over the next nearly 20 years, King would be jailed many times for his non-violent resistance to racial discrimination.

In the Charlotte community where I grew up, Martin Luther King, Jr. was not seen as a prophet called by God. He was seen as a trouble maker, an insurrectionist, someone who would not stay in his place.

It would be years before I would read speeches and sermons by King and realize how profound and prophetic they were. Years before I would realize how his insistence on a non-violent approach saved our country, including my own community, from much bloodshed. And even more years, in the places where I served in ministry, before I could talk about and use quotes from Dr. King in a worship service without getting into trouble.

Conclusion

Samuel, Nathanael, Philip, and Martin lived at different times. Their calls came in different ways. Each had to give up personal expectations and assumptions; yet each responded. And through responding, their perceptions were transformed, their lives took on new directions, and they were changed. And through their lives, the world was changed.

In our time, in our individual circumstances and assumptions and preconceived notions, God still calls. May we come and see. And answer: “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”