

1 Samuel 3:1-10 (11-20)
Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

1 Corinthians 6:12-20
John 1:43-51

There have been some famous phone calls in history. The first one was from Alexander Graham Bell to his assistant Thomas Watson on March 10, 1876. Bell said, "Mr. Watson, come here—I want to see you." Mr. Watson must have heard him for he was in another part of the lab, and came as summoned. Watson, we can say, was the first to "take the call." There was the one from President Richard Nixon to astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin on July 21, 1969. the first men on the moon. Nixon called to congratulate the astronauts, and to share how proud America was. There was the phone call on the night of June 17, 1972, from a night watchman named Frank Wills, to the Washington, DC police, telling them he had found duct tape over a lock on a door in the Watergate complex. That call set into motion the discovery of the Watergate political scandal that eventually led to the resignation of President Nixon. A long time ago, Samuel, a little boy in the temple had a hard time taking a call, but when he did, he had the right response: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

Samuel's mother had been barren and she struck a deal with God. If God would give her a son, she would dedicate him to God's service. Sure enough, she bore a son, Samuel, and Samuel was taken to the temple to serve under the priest Eli. One night Samuel was sleeping in the temple. We do not know how old he was when this happened. He may have been about twelve years old. Samuel heard his name called and he ran to Eli, woke him up, and said, "Here I am." Eli said he did not call the boy. Samuel heard the voice a second, and ran to Eli, and a third time, and ran to Eli. Eli told him each time that he did not call Samuel. Finally, Eli finally thought it could very well be God calling Samuel. He instructed Samuel that the next time he heard his name called,

to respond, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." God did call Samuel that fourth time, Samuel responded, and was attentive to God's call. He became a prophet, and a king maker, for he played a decisive role in designating Israel's first king. In the midst of uncertainty, Samuel responded to God's call.

We too may have uncertainty about our call. It is not so much that we don't want to take God's call, as it is uncertainty about whether it is God's call. Is it God's call or is it just our own desire, or someone else's desire? Consider the case of E. Stanley Jones, an American Christian who for years was a missionary in India. When he was 23, a college president asked him to teach at the college. The president told him, "It is the will of the student body, the will of the townspeople, the will of the faculty and we believe it is the will of God for you to teach in this college." At the same time, however, a friend wrote to him saying, "I believe it is the will of God for you to go into evangelistic work here in America." During the same period, Jones also received a letter from his denomination's mission board saying, "It is our will to send you to India." And if all of that were not enough, he suspected that God's will for him was to go as a missionary to Africa. Jones described this as a "traffic jam of wills." In the end, after much prayer, he eventually became convinced that he should go to India, which he did, and where he ministered faithfully until his death. But at the time of the competing calls, he had no foolproof way to be sure which, if any, was God's will, which, if any, was God's call. It's not like the caller id displays "God" when it is God's call. When I was out working in my father's cornfield, and I felt God had called me for I saw a cloud formation that was a very clear PC, preach Christ. Others think God may have meant plow corn. Not really! I think the only way we know whether it is God's call is with hindsight only.

Responding to God's call is a "come and see" adventure. Our gospel lesson is the account of Jesus calling Philip as a disciple. Philip then saw Nathaniel and declared, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth" Philip believed that they had found the fulfillment of Israel's hope. However, Nathaniel had his doubts, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" It is kind of like someone asking, can anything good come out of Washington, DC? Philip replied, "Come and see." Nathaniel did go and Nathaniel did respond to Jesus' call. Could the way to discern God's call is to respond, to go and see.

A story is told of a Mennonite farmer named Sam Reimer. One night Sam hears a voice saying to him, "Samuel, Samuel ... I am the God of your fathers, the Lord your God. Go and proclaim peace in Vietnam." In perplexity, Sam goes to his pastor, who tells him to listen for the voice a second time. The next night the call comes again, but Sam cannot get anyone to believe that he has truly heard God's voice. His pastor won't believe it; neither will his wife or his fellow Mennonites. The Canadian government won't give him a visa to Vietnam; the inter-Mennonite Church Service Society won't help him. Sam's reaction to these rebuffs is to give up hope and die. On his deathbed he says to his wife, "When I heard the voice, I should've gone. Left a note and gone. When you know like that, are chosen, you shouldn't wait, talk. Go."

Our call is to go. The focus is on living out our discipleship, not on what we believe. There is nothing in these stories about what Samuel or the disciples believed. Jesus called them, and they responded. That doesn't mean Presbyterians don't believe anything. We believe that Jesus Christ is Lord. That is the requirement for membership

in the Presbyterian Church. Jesus calls us to follow him. Disciple means “follower.” To be a disciple is to follow Jesus in mission to our city, our nation, and to the world.

When Eli was a priest of the Lord, judges ruled the land, and, as the book of Judges notes: "All the people did what was right in their own eyes." And, of course, what many decided was "right in their own eyes" was nowhere close to what was right in the eyes of God. There were Eli's his two no-good sons who were priests. Their behavior was not acceptable to God or their father. The reading from Samuel begins, "The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread." You get the feeling that God Samuel because of that special challenge. We live in a society that is becoming more and more unchurched. For many in our society the word of the Lord is rare. We are presented with a special challenge. It is a challenge because the church is struggling, trying to discern how to do mission in this new context. The church may be in decline, but there is no lack of mission! J. Herbert Nelson, stated clerk of the Presbyterian Church, has been challenging the church by declaring that the church is not dying. The church is reforming! There is work for the church to do! Go! Do!

When Nathaniel met Jesus that first time, Jesus said to him, "here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit?" Surprised, Nathaniel asked Jesus how he knew Nathaniel. Jesus replied, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Nathaniel declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus responded, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these!" In our discipleship, we will see greater things!

To the Lord who speaks to us, strengthens us,
and blesses us with peace,
be all glory and honor forever. Amen.