



**University Christian Church**  
(Disciples of Christ)  
Austin, Texas

University Christian Church - Austin

C. Kutz-Marks

**It's Your Call**

Epiphany 2, b, Jan. 18, 2009

I Sam. 3:1-20

The story of the young Samuel that Roslyn read for us, really needs to be put into context. Long before Samuel was conceived, his mother Hannah led a frustrated life. Hannah was getting up in years and was unable to have children. In those days a woman without children was understood to have been cursed by God. But in truth the scriptures teach us that God dearly loved Hannah.

On one occasion Hannah went to Temple of the Lord in the city of Shiloh. Now, Shiloh was where the ark of the covenant was kept. For a long time Shiloh had been a supremely holy place, where pilgrims believed there was an especially good chance that the God would hear and respond positively to their prayers.

Hannah came and prayed, asking that God give her a son. Hannah vowed that if God would give her a son, she would dedicate that child to God' service in the Temple.

The Temple's priest Eli, noticed her pouring her soul before the Lord. And after a brief conversation, he blessed her, asking that God heed her fervent prayers.

Unbeknownst to Eli, this woman and her child would figure greatly in Eli's future. For when her prayer for a son was granted by God, and when the boy was weaned, she, honoring her vow, brought the baby, Samuel to Eli at the Temple that Samuel might live there ever after as a servant to the Lord at the Shiloh Temple.

As the boy grew strong and faithful about his duty. His mother would visit yearly and bring him a new robe each visit. And in time Hannah, and her husband were blessed with 5 other children.

It is into this scene that we enter the reading from I Samuel

"Now the boy Samuel was ministering unto the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days. Visions were not widespread."

And one night, one very special night, all that begins to change.

The boy is lying in his bed, presumably asleep when he hears a voice calling him by name, "Samuel, Samuel." He thinks that his master Eli needs him. "Here am I" he responds as he runs to Eli's side. Eli says he did not call and sends him back to his bed to sleep.

Twice more this same scene happens, before Eli senses something special may be happening. He tells Samuel, "Go lie down again, and if the voice comes again, answer it, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

And the dam breaks. Though he had been working in the Temple since he was an infant, the scripture teaches us that Samuel as yet was not sensitive to the Lord's leading:

“Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him." But this night through his dreams: just as Jacob had, just as Joseph his son had, just as Peter would, as Joseph the father of Jesus would, and so many more in the scriptures....**SAMUEL HEARD THE VOICE OF GOD CALL TO HIM IN A DREAM.**

In the ancient world, people understood better than we usually do that dreams are a special opportunity for God to break through the crowded consciousness of people when they are resting in sleep. Long before Freud called dreams "the royal

road to the unconscious", or Carl Jung began the field of modern dream analysis; our ancestors in faith were discovering God within the foggy field of dreams that most often we cannot remember, or that we choose to forget.

And this was only the first of a life filled with messages from God through Samuel for the people. This oracle of doom for Eli and his family was followed by Samuel's masterful ministry at the Temple as its priest. The people came to love and to trust Samuel. Through him their faith in God was gradually restored. Samuel brought integrity back to their religion and their national life.

At the Lord's behest, Samuel first anointed Saul as King of Israel, and the later his successor, the greatest of all Israelite kings, King David. Samuel was a power for healing and encouragement for the nation for many years, because one night as a boy SAMUEL HAD LEARNED HIS MOST IMPORTANT LESSON, to hear a voice.... and to recognize it as the voice of his God!

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On this holiday weekend when we honor the life of Martin Luther King, Jr., the simple truth is that King's effective leadership was a fateful convergence of the times, capabilities & the faithfulness of Dr. King that well mirrors Samuel's prophetic ministry. Martin Luther King heard a word from the Lord, and though society thought it impossible, through King's restatement for that day of Jesus' teaching of non-violent but active resistance to evil.... in this case the manifest evil being racial segregation, a whole people was set on a path towards freedom from the injustice of hundreds of years.

Though we celebrate today, that work is not yet complete for the African-Americans of this nation, nor is it complete for Hispanic or South Asians and others

who still feel the stings and blows of discrimination. But Dr. King's leadership put us on the right road and with the inauguration of Barak Obama as President of the United States on Tuesday we remove another stone that we can only hope is a foundation stone in that thick wall of a still persistent racism.

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The word that came to Samuel and the word that came to Martin Luther King, is a word that is destined for us. In my heart, I do believe that the Lord God pours through the Holy Spirit a special anointing on some people such as Samuel and Martin Luther King, who are charged to lead. But I believe God has for each of us- yes, every one of us- as a constitutive element of each human destiny, the experience of the presence of God. Maybe not with Samuel's clarity of voice. Maybe not with Martin's clarity of purpose. But the very same joyful experience of knowing God present and sensing God's guidance in the directions of our ministering.

So let me ask you point blank, do you know the voice of God that Samuel heard? Do you recognize when and how God is guiding you in particular direction? Can you discern the difference between the guidance of God and all those other psychological drives and yearnings, and – I'm not afraid to use the word – spirits, that try to determine your path? Remember Eli's good advice: Listen! It could be your Call!

Make time in your schedule to be silent before God.

QUIET EVEN YOUR PRAYERS.

CLEAR YOUR MIND OF EVERYTHING.... AND LISTEN.

MAKE IT A PART OF YOUR DAILY ROUTINE.

"BE STILL, AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD!" says Ps. 46: 10

As in Is. 30:15 we find, "IN QUIETNESS AND TRUST SHALL BE

YOUR STRENGTH."

Go, said Eli, the wise elder to his pupil Samuel. Put yourself in the best possible position to hear the Lord's call.

Before that day Samuel had lived and worked in the Temple every day of his young life that he could remember. No doubt his prayers had been sincere. No doubt he had sought the Lord's presence. But it was not in his frantic praying, but in the SILENT SPACE that the Lord spoke to him.

SILENT SPACES, WHERE THE HOLY SPIRIT can gently move the contents of our consciousness and the contents of our character into new and better configurations:

Writing down in a JOURNAL the questions, intuitions, insights given you... about your inner world,  
intentionally remembering, recording, studying your dreams  
talking with a spiritual director,  
reading about the lives of the saints, finding a prayer partner, or a spiritual friend  
taking a private retreat time....

In other words, putting ourselves in the best possible position to hear the Lord's call.

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And when the call does come, Samuel's next response of course might be our guide, as well. "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

How those words Samuel uttered must have supported all those of have moved forward the cause of Christ. How Martin Luther King must have been

encouraged to be reminded of this son of the Shiloh Temple's profound obedience. Is it coincidence that the word of the Lord came to Samuel , to one so thoroughly dedicated to the Lord's way? No, my friends, for as Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see [and I would add “ and hear”] God. “<sup>i</sup>

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Each year at this time we lift up Martin Luther King, our brother in Jesus Christ, to honor his courage & wisdom, to remember & revivify his dream. But it is not just Martin’s dream, anymore. It is our dream, too. It was our Jesus who taught us the dream. It is the living Christ who will not let it die.

Friends, I challenge you take these precious moments and grow from them. Tomorrow many of you will have a holiday, as the years roll by, more and more of us will have the day off. Here is my challenge to you. Don't lose the day in typical holiday eating, drinking, sleeping, gaming, and working. Spend at least a part of it to enriching your spirit.....

In addition to responding the call to serve the wider community in doing good works tomorrow...as emphasize by President –elect Obama...that will benefit the community and engage us in some special way, I encourage you to decide right now to set about some time tomorrow....

1)Spend an hour or more reading the works of Martin Luther King or one of our contemporaries who, like him, embodies God's commitment to JUSTICE, especially one of the recaptured gems of the gospel in the past century, Jesus' teaching about NON-VIOLENT BUT ACTIVE RESISTANCE TO EVIL.

2) Spend some moments teaching your children, grandchildren, or talking with friends and neighbors about what it means to stand up for the needs and rights of the oppressed today,

3) Review the story of King's fight of Civil Rights, the cost of discipleship,

but most of all, pray!

4) Pray that God will open our ears and hearts to the cries for food and freedom, for jobs and justice, for health and hope that crying din that might overwhelm our earth. Pray that God will show us those today, those who are being enslaved because of our blindness.

And if you have a bit of fear that hearing YOUR CALL from God might lead you out of your routines into a new commitment, a new way of being, that goes beyond your capacity, your strength or your will; “fear not,” as the angels always say in the Bible. Fear not, because the same God that utters YOUR CALL to serve God’s people will also provide you all the strength and all the wisdom that you will need to follow through.

AMEN.

<sup>i</sup> Matt. 5:8