

2 Epiphany, Yr B (2012)
I Samuel 3:1-10(11-20)
John 1:43-51

The Rev. Karen C. Barfield
St. Joseph's Episcopal Church

In the name of the one, holy and living God. Amen.

For Christmas I was given a book entitled, *Celtic Benediction*.
It is book of Morning and Night Prayer.

Each time of prayer begins with silence and these words:

*"Be still
and aware of God's presence within
and all around."*

Have you ever noticed that our lives get so busy,
our time so full - that we often forget to pause,
to take a deep breath
and listen?

Today's Scriptures contain stories of taking the time to listen
and to listen *deeply*...
to God
and to one another.

Today's Scriptures offer us invitations...

The invitation to see light in the midst of darkness,
the invitation to hear God's voice in the midst of silence,
the invitation to look within ourselves,
summon some courage,
and step out beyond the limited scope of our vision.

In the first book of Samuel, the author makes this observation:

"The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread." (I Sam 3:1)

Jumping forward in time several thousand years, current day author and theologian, Barbara Brown Taylor, makes a similar observation:

"Silence has become God's final defense against our idolatry....

Our language is broken.

There is famine in the land.

God's true name can never be spoken." (*When God is Silent*, jacket cover)

Eli, the temple priest, has become so old that his world is one of total darkness. He can no longer even see the hand in front of his face; and his sons, his rightful heirs and aids, are corrupt to the core and nowhere to be seen – at least not when most needed.

So, assisting him in his duties is the 12-year old Samuel.

Now Samuel was promised to God's service by his mother, Hannah, from before his birth. For nine years now, since Samuel was three, he has served Eli in the most sacred of spaces.

Only the priest is allowed in the Holy of Holies, yet Samuel sleeps every night next to the Ark of the Covenant.

“Samuel! Samuel!” rings out his name, disturbing his sleep.

Immediately the boy jumps up thinking that Eli is in need.

“Here I am. What is it?”

“I did not call,” says Eli. “Go lie down.”

We are told that at this point in his life Samuel did not yet know God; the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. It is remarkable to think that although Samuel had lived next to the Ark and served in the Temple for 9 years, he did not know God.

Apparently, knowing God requires *more* than being present-
it requires relationship.

Three times the call comes, each with Samuel rushing to Eli's side.
Then in the midst of the darkness, Eli understands.
It is God.

Go.

Lie down.

Wait.

Listen.

“Samuel! Samuel!”

“Speak, for your servant is listening.”

Listening...

We often get so busy that we forget this art.
So lost is the gift of listening in our culture that we now pay people to do it for us.

Eli listened to Samuel, and in listening discerned the call of God.
Eli then invited Samuel himself to listen....
to listen in the dark stillness of the night.

Barbara Brown Taylor reminds us that the central Jewish declaration of faith is not the “I believe” that Christians have adopted, but “Hear, O Israel.”

The focus is on the ears, not the lips –
The focus is on listening,
not speaking.

She says, “Even now, some Christians have trouble listening to God. Many of us prefer to speak. Our corporate prayers are punctuated with phrases such as ‘Hear us, Lord’ or ‘Lord, hear our prayer,’ as if the burden to listen were on God and not us. We name our concerns, giving God suggestions on what to do about them. What reversal of power might occur if we turned the process around, naming our concerns and asking God to tell us what to do about them? ‘Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening.’” (*When God is Silent*, pp. 49-50)

In our Gospel reading we again hear such invitations to listen
and to enter into relationship with God.

Jesus calls to Philip, “Follow me.”

Philip then calls to Nathanael, “Come and see.”

These are invitations to enter into relationship with the living God.

Nathanael, however, was a bit skeptical. He knew Jesus came from Nazareth, and Nazareth was the backwater, good-for-nothing area of the land. How could the long-awaited Messiah come from such a place? How was this possible?

And yet, he accepted the invitation to relationship and himself proclaimed Jesus as none other than “the Son of God,” “the King of Israel.”

Fred Craddock says, “The voice of God in Jesus was not a shout. In him, the revelation of God comes to us as a whisper.” (*Preaching*, p. 57)

So, this means for us that in order to catch the whisper, we must hush, lean forward and trust that what we hear is the voice of God. (Taylor, *When God is Silent*, p. 57)

God calls us again and again –
 through complete strangers
 through friends and family,
 in the events of our daily lives,
sometimes even in the dark stillness of the night...

if only we will pause
 and listen.

During this season of Epiphany those who want will be meeting in weekly small groups to listen to the stories of each other's lives. To hear how and where God has moved in and among us in our various histories and callings.

I invite you to sign up in the parish hall for one of these groups.

 You may choose to share a meal together.

 You may choose to simply sit in the silent presence of God and one another.

 There are no right answers as to what to share.

We are simply sharing our lives with one another, and through entering relationship with one another, we will be entering more deeply into relationship with God.

As we learn one another's gifts and passions, then we may begin to hear where the voice of God is calling us as a community of faithful disciples at St. Joseph's.

Regardless of whether you can join a small group or not,

 I invite you to take some time each day to pause and say,
 "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."