

Someone's Calling Your Name
I SAMUEL 3:1-11
JANUARY 17, 2021

Listen! Someone's calling your name. Can you hear it? Maybe it has been a while since you've heard your name spoken in such warm, loving tones. God calls you in a friendly, affirming, loving voice, just the way you are.

The world is often not so kind when calling your name. Sometimes the world takes your name in vain – you know how that goes. On the subject of names, pastor and novelist Frederick Buechner writes:

“If someone mispronounces my name in some foolish way, I have the feeling that what's foolish is me ... If my name were different, I would be different. When I tell somebody my name, I have given him or her a hold over me that he didn't have before. If he calls it out, I stop, look and listen whether I want to or not.”

Frederick Buechner, Wishful Thinking

If you've ever been a parent, you know what I mean. As a father, I used to stop dead in my tracks if any kid anywhere within shouting distance yelled out, “Dad!” for any reason at all, I Stop, look and listen, even if the kid's not my own. Names have power.

One thing is for sure – No one knows our name, no one calls our name like God, who spoke well of Jesus, saying, “This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.” God's calling your name ... today ... tomorrow ... for the rest of your life, whether you've known God all your life, or you're just getting acquainted.

Of course it doesn't stop with your name. It's a sure bet that once God starts calling your name, God is going to want your heart as well. Even if you're a life-long Christian, God has something new in store for you. Sometimes for Christians, the Good News becomes old news.

But God says, “Behold, I am doing a new thing.” God is a God of new beginnings. God did a new thing in the life of Samuel. It was also a new experience for the elder Priest Eli. The Word of God was “rare” in those days, the writer says. There were not many visions. But for young, twelve-year-old Samuel, it was a brand new exciting opportunity for God to transform his life.

Today I would like to share with you a little bit about Samuel -- a remarkable young man in the Old Testament book that bears his name, and how his life was changed when he heard God calling his name. Then we will look at what can

happen today when God calls your name. Hopefully you will be encouraged and challenged to renew your relationship with God, and share God with others.

First, meet Samuel. Samuel is living proof that you can sleep in church and still hear the Word of God! Well, today, we're not in church, but you might fall asleep in your easy chair! It was during the night when Samuel first heard a voice calling him: "Samuel! Samuel!" The voice woke him from a sleep and he was confused.

Naturally, he went to Eli the priest, thinking he had called him. "Here I am Eli, for you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call you, Samuel . . . Go back to bed . . ." So Samuel went back to bed.

But a strange thing happened – the voice called him again – "Samuel! Samuel!" Did you ever notice that when God is trying to get your attention, it usually happens more than once? God comes to us again and again, just like with Samuel.

So after Samuel went back to bed, a voice called out to Samuel again: "Samuel! Samuel!" Again, Samuel went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." "No, no, Samuel, I did not call you. Go back and lie down."

Well, this happened three times, and finally, the wise Eli said, "You know, Samuel, I believe something out of the ordinary is going on here. I believe it is the Lord who is calling you... so go and lie down; and if the voice calls you again, you shall say, "Speak, Lord for your servant is listening." (3:9)

So Samuel went back and laid down in his usual place. And the Lord did call again, and spoke to Samuel. "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of anyone who hears of it tingle." (3:11)

My grandmother used to say, "If your ears are burning, someone must be talking about you! Well, someone was calling Samuel's name, and it made his ears tingle. In fact, I'm betting Samuel got that tingling sensation all over his body, because God was calling him, and was about to change his life.

As the scene in the temple concludes, the writer adds these words to describe Samuel: He writes: "As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground in vain." What a wonderful thing to say of your life – "that none of God's words fall to the ground in vain." That ought to be every preacher's prayer. That ought to be every Christians prayer.

For Samuel, it was the beginning of a new phase in his life. He went forward with a strong sense of God's calling . . . a new identity . . . and a new purpose and

meaning for his life. God used Samuel to accomplish great things, not only for himself, but for Israel.

Jesus knows our name, and so much more. He knows our dark side as well as the outside face we present to the world. He knows our failures and our dreams; he knows our prejudices and our passions, our excuses and our desires.

This Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves. Jesus thinks our name is a beautiful name, and when he calls your name, it is not in judgment, but with unconditional love, and with a genuine desire to fill you with grace and power.

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What does it all mean for us? Today God is calling your name, just like Samuel's name, and a whole host of others. And God calls us by name so we may also share the good news with others. Today I believe the most important person in the church is the next person who walks through the door searching for God or looking for a community of faith. That will have to wait until we begin meeting in person again. Jesus said, "Whenever you welcome the stranger, you welcome me." The book of Hebrews encourages us to practice hospitality, for in doing so we are entertaining angels unaware to us.

There were angels – human angels who once ministered to me. Many years ago as a young seminarian in Chicago, I had the good fortune to stumble upon Lake View Presbyterian Church – just a few blocks down from Wrigley Field on Chicago's north side.

It was a church unlike any other I have ever encountered. It was a More Light Church early on in the 1970's. It was a sanctuary church that welcomed Central American refugees. It was a church where homeless people could be found sleeping in the church basement when they would not have survived the harsh Chicago winters.

As a young seminarian searching for a place to belong and trying to discern God's call, it was an amazing place. Upon entering that first Sunday, a young man by the name of Norm greeted me at the door. His welcome was genuine, and while we were talking, several other people came up extended their welcome as well.

I didn't know at the time that my life was about to be changed, and a call to ministry would emerge as a result of Lakeview Church. That entire congregation created a sense of welcome and hospitality.

If it wasn't for the Lakeview Church, I may not be here speaking to you today, and probably would not have experienced a call to ministry; I wouldn't have met my wife, since she was also was a pastor, and the list goes on in all.

Never underestimate what good can happen when someone feels like they belong. It all started because someone called me by name, and welcomed me into the church. When God calls your name, it is no accident. When God provides a purpose and plan for your life, it is no accident.

Someone's calling your name. Can you hear it? God calls you by name so that you can reach out to others. You can never repay God for all that God has done, but you can pass it on. I cannot repay the Lakeview Church in Chicago for all they have given me, but I can pass it on, and somehow I imagine that is exactly what they would want.

Today God is calling you so that you can reach out to others in the same warm, welcoming tone that someone once spoke to you. At a time in our country where there is a lot of name calling and violence, God calls our name in a different way. God calls you in warm, inviting tones that maybe only you can hear. What will you do? How will you respond? What is your part in bringing peace – peace to the community, peace to the individuals you meet, peace within yourself?

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Today we are remembering Dr Martin Luther King Jr. From a very early age, he heard God calling his name, and he said, "Yes" in word and deed. Like Samuel, Martin said, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

Martin Luther King was the son of a Baptist pastor who was licensed to preach in 1947 when he was just 19 years old. In 1948 he became the Associate pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church where he served with his father. In 1954 he was appointed as the twentieth pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. In 1960 the family would move back to Atlanta where Rev. King would again serve as co-pastor with his father at the Ebenezer Baptist Church and as director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference until his assassination in 1968.

Martin Luther King had to deal with racism, injustice, and the fear and hate of segregation. While he was a pastor, husband and father, the Civil Rights movement was picking up speed and Rev. King was compelled to speak out and to get involved. He noticed a nation gripped in racism and violence calling his name.

Today we need his words and actions more than ever. Less than two weeks ago, we witnessed a violent attack upon the capitol. We watched angry people breaking through doors and doing major damage inside the building, while fighting and

injuring scores of people. We can only imagine that the intent was to injure or kill congressional members.

I think about what Martin Luther King would have done, and how he would have responded. One thing we know for sure is that he would not have stood still. He would not have remained silent, and whatever actions he took would have been non-violent. But he would already be at work, bringing our nation together, and bringing violent anarchists to justice. He heard God calling his name, and he heard the call to move forward in service to the nation and bring about equality and justice.

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Where will you be, and what will you be doing when God calls your name? These are incredibly challenging times, and yet as people of faith, we have hope. You can make a difference. We can make a difference.

God is calling your name. It may be an action or a voice you cannot ignore. It may be in the middle of the night when something wakes you from a sound sleep, just like young Samuel. During these challenging times, it is imperative to listen, and even more important to act when God calls you. Listen! Someone's calling your name. Can you hear it? Amen

Watch this short film in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Day.
It is as timely today as ever.

<https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2021/1/4/free-film-for-martin-luther-king-jr-day>

1 Samuel 3:1-11

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³ the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the Lord called, “Samuel! Samuel!”^[a] and he said, “Here I am!” ⁵ and ran to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” So he went and lay down. ⁶ The Lord called again, “Samuel!” Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. ⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰ Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” ¹¹ Then the Lord said to Samuel, “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle.