1-20/21-18 Rev. Amy Haines

1 Samuel 3:1-10, Mark 1:14-20 Called

In a typical week, how many voices clamor for your attention?

There’s your boss, your co-workers, your friends, your family, your pastor, the media, and everyone else.

There’s the bills waiting to be paid, the house ready to be cleaned, the ads enticing you to buy what you don’t really need, social media yearning for you to spend hours seeing what others are doing, and the TV telling you to sit down and forget the rest of your day.

Then there’s the voice inside your head that rattles off your to-do list, there’s the voice inside your body that says stop and let me sleep, there’s the voice inside your heart asking if this is all there is to life.

Which voices do you listen to? Which voices do you tune out?

And over the din of technology, over the demands of your day, do you also hear the voice of Jesus calling lovingly and persistently to you this morning, “Come and follow me.”?

How do you respond?

Today, God calls us.

Today, God calls us to a life of discipleship.

Today, God calls us to follow Jesus.

How will we respond?

Previously this month we have been reminded that God loves us and claims us and knows us.

Now it is our turn to respond to such presence and knowledge and grace.

After Jesus had been baptized, blessed and tempted, Jesus emerged from the wilderness proclaiming “Now is the time! Here comes God’s kingdom. Change your heart and lives and trust this good news!” Jesus picked up the message that John the Baptist had begun.

Yet Jesus did not immediately take this message to Jerusalem. Instead, he returned to rural Galilee, and walking along the beach one day beside the Sea of Galilee Jesus saw brothers Simon and Andrew net-fishing. This was hard work, but the only work they knew. Jesus called out to them, “Come and follow me. I’ll show you how to catch men and women instead of fish.

I’ll show you how to fish for people.”

Simon and Andrew didn’t ask questions. They didn’t form a committee to ponder Jesus’ offer.

They didn’t hesitate in their response but immediately dropped their nets and followed Jesus.

Further down the beach Jesus saw brothers James and John mending their fishing nets with their father Zebedee. Jesus made the same offer to them and immediately these brothers also dropped their nets, left their father with the hired hands, and followed Jesus.

Notice Jesus did not choose those who were apprenticed to be rabbis, those deemed the smartest Jews with impeccable lineages, or those who lived near the power center of Jerusalem.

Instead, Jesus’ first disciples were four rural fishermen apprenticed in the family fishing business. They would not have been the smartest in their class. They would never expect to live anywhere near Jerusalem, let along become a household name. They were ordinary, hardworking men from the forgotten area of the Galilee.

And that is why Jesus chose them as his disciples.

No one would be able to say that they were privileged to walk with Jesus because of their résumés. No one would be able to say that the growth of the kingdom could be credited to their IQ. God’s kingdom would grow by God’s power and might, not their skill or pedigree.

They were ordinary. They were unqualified. And they are much like us.

They were not the first, nor were they the last,

called by God at an unexpected time in an unexpected place.

..Rebekah (17th century B.C.) was drawing water at the city well at Nahor.

Amos (8th century B.C.) was picking fruit in the fields of Tekoa.

Paul (1st century A.D.) was traveling on the road to Damascus.

Lydia (1st century A.D.) was selling prized purple cloth in Thyatira.

Augustine (354-430) was out working in the garden.

John Wesley (1703-1791) was listening to a lay person read the Scriptures.

Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531) was working at a shepherd's hut nestled in the Alps.

Phillipp Melanchthon (1497-1560) was teaching Greek in a small German university.

John Locke (1632-1704) was a private secretary.

T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) was a bank clerk.

Toyohiko Kagawa (1888-1960) was studying English in a Kobe, Japan, missionary school.

C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) was riding in the side car of his brother's bike.

Charles Edward Ives (1874-1954) was writing insurance policies.

Helen Joseph (1905-1992 ) was serving time in jail.

Clarence Jordan (1912-1941) was farming pecans in Georgia.

 -“Returning God’s Call” 1-20-91 homileticsonline.com adapted

Centuries before Jesus called his first disciples, God called out to a young boy named Samuel in the middle of the night.

And nothing grabs our attention quite like a voice in the night. Ever had one of those phone calls or cries that jolt you out of bed and almost always signals trouble? A voice of a child from the bedroom down the hall, “Mom, I’m sick.” A teenager’s voice on the cell phone: “Dad, I’ve run out of gas.” Last week some parents were not happy to hear at 5:20am, “Springboro Schools are closed today.” Occasionally I have received an early morning phone call which says, “Pastor Amy, my spouse is in the hospital” or “Mom passed away about an hour ago.”

Centuries before Jesus called his first disciples, in the time of Israel’s history after they had settled in the Promised Land yet prior to their clamor for a king, many Israelites felt that God has stopped calling. Visions from God were not widespread. The word of God was rare.

Yet God had not stopped talking; Israel had instead stopped listening. Even though the Israelites could look back and remember countless instances of God’s guidance and grace, the people of Israel had become complacent and corrupt, seeking their own ways rather than the way of God. This was even true in the house of Eli whose own sons, the Temple priests, cared more for their own greed than for the word of God. And Eli could not stop them.

Into this mix of old Eli and his corrupt sons appeared a boy named Samuel. Before Samuel was born his mother Hannah had pleaded with God for a baby, promising that if she could have a son then her son would be dedicated to serving God all his life. Hannah was one of two wives of Elkanah and the other wife, Peninnah, could easily produce children while Hannah tried but continued in the shame of barrenness. Only after begging and pleading and bargaining with God was Hannah blessed with Samuel, whom she then turned around and offered back in service to the Lord.

Young Samuel was serving the Lord by learning the duties of the Temple under the old priest Eli. One of Samuel’s duties was to make sure that the lamp of God did not burn out. So one night, while on duty in the house of the Lord, Samuel was awakened by a voice calling out his name, “Samuel, Samuel.” Because Samuel did not yet have a relationship with the Lord God,

Samuel thought the voice calling out to him was the voice of Eli. So this boy goes running to Eli, wakes him and says, “Here I am. You called me?” Old Eli said, “I didn’t call you. Go back to sleep.” So Samuel went back to sleep.

In his sleep, God called to Samuel a second time, “Samuel. Samuel.” Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am. You called me?” Old Eli said, “I didn’t call you. Go back to sleep.”

A third time the voice of God called, “Samuel. Samuel.” And a third time, the boy Samuel went to Eli and asked, “Here I am. You called me?”

Finally Old Eli began to figure out what was going on and told Samuel to go back to bed and if the voice speaks again, to answer, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” So a fourth time God’s voice again called out, “Samuel, Samuel.” Samuel finally replied, “Speak Lord for your servant is listening. My spirit is open. Talk to me.”

And God spoke to Samuel, condemning Eli and his sons for disobeying the Lord. Young Samuel then went back to sleep and the next morning dreaded telling Eli this word of the Lord. Yet when old Eli asked what God had spoken, young Samuel spoke the truth. The prophecy soon was fulfilled and God was with Samuel the rest of his life as he became a judge, a prophet and an anointer of kings.

Young and more mature. Ordinary and forgotten.

Devout and rebellious. Male and female.

God calls us all.

The basic call of God is the same for all of us—follow Jesus.

What Jesus said to fishermen beside the Sea of Galilee Jesus also says to us today:

Follow me, and believe in me. Observe me, and learn my ways. Share who God is, whose you are, what God has done, and what God will do. Trust me and follow me.

You don’t need to have all of the answers before you follow. You don’t even need to have it all together in life. This is a lifelong journey of faith, not a two-week intensive. This is a time to observe and learn, then go and live. Just be willing to work with me and learn from me, and over time you will become a fisher of people. Follow me.

The basic call of God is the same for all of us—follow Jesus.

We are not all called to become a preacher. We are not all called to change the world.

What we are called to do is follow wherever Jesus leads us. How we live out our discipleship and where our journey of faith will take us, will be as diverse as our individual lives.

As United Methodist Christians we believe in the priesthood of all believers, meaning that each one of us has direct access to God through faith in Jesus Christ. And each one of us have been called by God to live by faith wherever life takes us. Our vocations, our callings, will vary widely.

For some people, God’s calling will be to set-apart ministry as a licensed or ordained pastor.

Vicki Robinson is taking that next step in following God’s call as she interviews this week on the road toward ordination.

For other people, that calling will be to the mission field abroad or to a non-profit ministry closer to home. Some of you have been called to assist at the food pantries while others have been called to be reading tutors while others have been called to be Stephen Ministers.

For some people, that calling will include being a witness to Christian ethics at work or being a witness to responsible parenting at home. Work or home are often two of the hardest places to follow God’s call and stand firm in faith.

For other people, that calling will include sharing one’s faith with one’s neighbors or living one’s faith in the community. When was the last time you invited a neighbor to join you for worship?

Some of you did last fall. Some of you did at Christmas. Then why not today?

God’s call is as varied as our diverse lives. Yet wherever we find ourselves, in whatever situations, Christ calls us to live for him there.

Michael Rogness once shared,

…A friend of mine is a junior high school teacher. Since he was active in his congregation as a boy, some of his relatives urged him to consider becoming a pastor. He told his own pastor that he felt no calling to be a pastor but felt God wanted him to be a school teacher. His wise pastor told him to follow his calling, and he would be serving God as well in a school room as in a pastor’s office. That pastor understood what it meant to follow God’s call in one’s vocation.

-Michael Rogness 1-25-15 workingpreacher.org

Are you ready to listen for God’s call in your life, wherever that call will take you?

Or does the immediacy of the call and response in Mark’s Gospel scare you?

I think that if we were honest with one another today, the immediacy and persistency of God’s call does scare us. We are not ready for such a call. We are not sure we really want to accept such a call, for we know that call will change us. And in our world today, in a culture that is more like a shouting match than a quiet dialogue, how hard is it for us to listen for God’s voice?

How hard is it for us to put aside our selfish desires to listen for God’s desires? How hard is it for us to hear and follow God’s call to be Jesus’ disciples in the midst of our daily lives?

Someone once listed three rather uncomfortable, uncontrollable characteristics of being called:

1) that God often calls us to do the very thing we have said we would never be caught dead doing;

2) that God often calls us to do the very thing other people are better at doing than we are;

3) that God often calls us when and where we least expect it.

 --Homiletics 1-20-91

Have any of those been true in your life?

How did the disciples respond so quickly to such a life-changing invitation? Didn’t they want to know details of what is ahead? Didn’t they want to know what is expected of them? We have nothing of their thoughts or questions recorded, if they ever spoke any aloud. Instead, we have a sudden call and an immediate response. Jesus called and they followed. And we are called to do the same.

Consider what calls in our lives today elicit an immediate response:

a siren; an unexpected phone call; sickness; even a mouse or snake or spider.

Consider what moments in our lives cause us to completely change our lives:

A marriage proposal; a death; military orders to move; a new job in a new city; the call of Jesus.

Pastor Larry Broding remind us:

Think of the times when you say, “I do, I will or I promise,” times when you make an instant commitment to an ongoing journey. That journey may be trading the single life for married life,

changing jobs or schools, raising a child to know Jesus, always being a phone call away for a friend in need. When we say “I do, I will or I promise” we are required to change our actions to match our words. -adapted from word-sunday.com

Whether we respond immediately or reluctantly, hesitantly or enthusiastically, you and I are called to today to respond to God’s call.

And beware—saying yes to following Jesus will change our lives.

Simon and Andrew, James and John, never really returned to fishing as their livelihood. They left nets and family behind to follow Jesus. Young Samuel, when he finally responded to the voice of God calling to him, grew up to be a prophet and priest who spent his life encouraging others to return to a vital faith relationship with God Almighty.

Even if your call is not to set apart ministry, how is God calling you to live for Jesus no matter your vocation or retirement plans, no matter your skills or your passions, no matter your age or ability?

I have known of men who became mentors to young fathers, and housewives who became faithful volunteers at the local food pantry. I have known parents whose parenting styles changed from judgement to grace when they said yes to following Jesus, and I have known couple on the brink of divorce learn how to put God first and speak their partner’s love language. I have known retirees who cannot get enough study in God’s word, and children who cannot get enough service on behalf of Jesus. All of these faithful individuals attribute new meaning to their lives through saying yes and growing in faith following Jesus wherever he calls them and leads them.

.. When Will Willimon was Dean of the Chapel at Duke University, prior to becoming and retiring as a United Methodist Bishop, he got a call from a VERY upset parent.

"I hold you personally responsible for this," the parent said.

"Me?" Dr Willimon asked.

The father was hot, upset because his graduate school bound daughter had just informed him that she was going to "throw it all away" and go do mission work with the Presbyterians in Haiti.

"Isn't that absurd!" shouted the father. "A BS degree in mechanical engineering from Duke

and she's going to dig ditches in Haiti."

"Well, I doubt that she's received much training in the Engineering Department here for that kind of work, but she's probably a fast learner and will probably get the hang of ditch-digging in a few months," Dr. Willimon said.

"Look," said the father, "this is no laughing matter. You are completely irresponsible to have encouraged her to do this. I hold you personally responsible," he said.

As the conversation went on, Dr. Willimon pointed out that the well-meaning but obviously unprepared parents were the ones who had started this ball rolling. THEY were the ones who had her baptized, read Bible stories to her, took her to Sunday School, let her go with the Presbyterian Youth Fellowship to ski in Vail.

Dr. Willimon said, "You're the one who introduced her to Jesus, not me."

"But all we ever wanted her to be was a Presbyterian," said the father, meekly.

 --William Willimon, Pulpit Resource, 9-10-95

as told by David Leininger leiningers.com 1-25-09

Brothers and sisters in Christ, if we claim the name of Jesus, if we claim our United Methodist heritage, if we claim to be an active participant in this local congregation, then we are called to listen and heed the call of God—a call to follow Jesus.

Are you listening for such a call?

Maybe God is knocking on your heart today to allow his Son Jesus in as Savior and Lord.

Maybe God is working on your heart today to spend more time listening to God in your relationship with Him rather than rushing through bible study or prayer.

Maybe God is calling you to be more intentional to live by faith at work, at home, in the community and in the world.

Maybe God is calling you to a commitment of service in a specific area of need.

Maybe God is calling you to begin the journey toward set apart ministry, no matter how young or how old you may be.

However God is calling you today, However God is encouraging you today, or however God is preparing you today to hear God’s call in the future, when you hear that soft, gentle voice,

when you feel that nudge of the Holy Spirit, when your call is affirmed by parents and friends and pastors around you, be ready to respond in the words of the young boy Samuel:

“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

May we be open to God’s call, respond in faith to God’s call, and grow as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

“Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening.”

May it be so.

Let us pray.