

Are you talking to me?  
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Epiphany 2

“God told me” are words that turn more people off faster than just about anything I know. We have heard more than we want to of God’s choice in our current political campaigns and never, ever say that to a Commission on Ministry. You will be out the door before you even finish. Why is that?

As we move forward in our visioning process and as I meet with people helping them discern where God is working in their life and where God is calling them, the question of does God really speak to people, how do I hear God’s word, how do I know it is God is a constant concern. In fact many people wonder why God would bother talking to them.

This is not a new question or problem. Our Samuel passage starts off by saying, “Even then the word of God was rare and visions were not widespread.” Part of the answer to why is the back story of the call of Samuel. The sons of Eli had turned away from their call and were no longer listening. The light was going out in the temple at Shiloh. However there is just enough light left that Eli recognizes that it is God who is calling Samuel. By the way Sam u el means God has heard in Hebrew.

The call of Samuel is rather unique among the call stories of prophets. There is no blazing revelation, but simply a voice in the night that calls him. However Samuel needs to be told by someone else that this is God speaking. He has not yet heard the voice of God. Or at least he doesn’t know that he has heard the voice of God. This is the last bit of service that Eli will give in the temple, to help Samuel recognize the voice and presence of God in his young life.

The challenge for us is that most of us do not have an Eli to give us the hint. For the awareness of God’s voice is rare in our land. In today’s world this is a role often played by a spiritual director. This can also be a role played by a community who prays together to help individuals and organizations discern the voice and presence of God. This is what the Listening Hearts program is about. But before we can spend time discerning God’s call there is an even more important issue.

That issue is that that I find people are often willing to believe that a great prophet like Samuel says is wonderfully made as in Psalm 139, Yet many find it hard to believe that we too are wonderfully made? That each of us is a wonderful and unique creation of God. That we are worthy of having God speak to us or that God would speak to us. Take a moment and again really listen to Psalm 139. Imagine that you are actually saying this to God.

139 Domine, probasti

1 Lord, you have searched me out and known me; \*  
you know my sitting down and my rising up;  
you discern my thoughts from afar.  
2 You trace my journeys and my resting-places \*  
and are acquainted with all my ways.  
3 Indeed, there is not a word on my lips, \*  
but you, O Lord, know it altogether.  
4 You press upon me behind and before \*  
and lay your hand upon me.  
5 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; \*  
it is so high that I cannot attain to it.  
6 Where can I go then from your Spirit? \*  
where can I flee from your presence?  
7 If I climb up to heaven, you are there; \*  
if I make the grave my bed, you are there also.  
8 If I take the wings of the morning \*  
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,  
9 Even there your hand will lead me \*  
and your right hand hold me fast.  
10 If I say, "Surely the darkness will cover me, \*  
and the light around me turn to night,"  
11 Darkness is not dark to you;  
the night is as bright as the day; \*  
darkness and light to you are both alike.  
12 For you yourself created my inmost parts; \*  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
13 I will thank you because I am marvelously made; \*  
your works are wonderful, and I know it well.  
14 My body was not hidden from you, \*  
while I was being made in secret  
and woven in the depths of the earth.  
15 Your eyes beheld my limbs, yet unfinished in the womb;  
all of them were written in your book; \*  
they were fashioned day by day,  
when as yet there was none of them.  
16 How deep I find your thoughts, O God! \*  
how great is the sum of them!  
17 If I were to count them, they would be more in number  
than the sand; \*  
to count them all, my life span would need to  
be like yours.

This is the ultimate image of God both immanent and transcendent. An image of God both involved in our very formation yet one who is far away reigning over all.

This is an image of God who knows us better than we know ourselves. An image of God that sounds a lot like our Collect for Purity at the beginning of the service. "Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid:"

This is an image of God where we can drop all pretenses and be the person God created us to be. Then like Samuel we can begin to hear and sense the presence of God no matter where we are or what we are doing.

In my newsletter article I talk about the difference between God's plan and God's call. Martin Smith in his lecture Co-Creators with God talks about this difference by saying he does not believe that God has some holy file cabinet up in heaven filled with life plans for each of us. So many just want to peek in the cabinet to see what is the plan for them. Then life will be easy.

Martin points out that this is not how God operates. There is no concrete plan that begins at our birth and runs until we die with every step planned out. He teaches that we are co-creators with God in our lives and the lives of those around us. God calls us in certain directions and we have the choice to respond or to head somewhere else. God will meet us and call to us and again we have a choice about what type of life we want to co-create with God. The challenge is to listen to where God is leading and then responding in a way that coincides with God's desire for us. I believe that the first desire of God is that we desire to listen.

Eli's sons had the choice to listen or walk the other way. They chose to walk away from God, to reject that relationship that God desires. Samuel chooses to listen to the voice and answers Here I am. He enters into a long a deep relationship with God. We all have that choice. Now choosing to walk with God does not guarantee an easy life. Samuel certainly faced his challenges as a prophet. Prophets are often not very popular people. Most people we consider saints were often thorns in the side of the status quo.

Instead Martin says we use this awareness of God's intimate relationship with us to co-create with God the world we live in. As individuals, as a congregation and as a church we are called to enter into a relationship with God to create a world the brings the kingdom closer to reality. This is not about heaven and our reward sometime after we die, but in bringing the kingdom to the world now.

I would like to close with a quote from Br. Geoffrey Tristram from the Society of St. John the Evangelist. This past week he sent out this on the daily "Give us a Word" email.

When God disturbs you, breaks into your life — just when everything seemed nice and comfortable — be thankful — for that is Gods Epiphany to you. —Br. Geoffrey Tristram SSJE

In this season of Epiphany, may we be open to God calling to us in the night, in the day, in our work, in our play, in our life. I pray that you are all willing to be disturbed, interrupted by God. For it is in that interruption that our relationship with God grows and flourishes.