

Epiphany 2, January 14, 2018

Text: 1 Samuel 3:1-10

Theme: What Do You Want To Be?

What do you want to be when you grow up? That is a phrase that I heard from as far back as I can remember. I think the first thing I wanted to be was a pilot because my Uncle John was a pilot and I thought it would be so cool to fly all over the world like he did. Then I remember wanting to be a business man. I think it was because my dad cleaned out his desk from work when he left a job and gave me a ton of old forms, an old phone, a stapler and a bunch of pens. Then I went through the typical rotation for boys of policeman, fireman, gunslinger and president of the United States. I don't remember when pastor entered the mix. I'm not sure it ever did. When people ask me when I decided to be a pastor, I often tell them that I'll let them know as soon as I decide.

Normally, God's calling is as mysterious as the call for Samuel. In our Old Testament text Samuel heard God calling him, and he assumed it was Eli. Why wouldn't he? You are asleep in the night and hear someone calling your name, you are going to assume that it is another person in the house. Not once have I ever heard my name, roused from sleep and said, "Speak Lord, your servant listens." But that was exactly what Eli told Samuel to do and by golly, it worked. Eli was wise enough to know that God calls us in many and varied ways. Sometimes we can miss it if we are not paying attention and listening for his voice. Of course, for me anyway, his voice has generally come through

reading his word and hearing his word in sermons, readings and hymn in worship.

For me, his call has also involved his opening doors. As he threw open doors, I walked through them. There was never any dramatic music. An opportunity was offered and I accepted. "We would like to invite you to be part of the class of 1990 at Concordia Seminary." Ok then. I wasn't planning anything better. "We would like for you to be our pastor." Yes, that sounds like a natural transition from graduation. And so it goes to this day. So far, I have only turned down a couple of God's offers along the way. We are not mandated to leave one path to pursue another as long as either path is serving him. But I can tell you that I wish I could backtrack. Knowing what I know now, life would have been much smoother had I accepted his offer when he made it. But he worked everything to my good, just like he promised he would, and he got me here, to Trinity, to raise my kids in a powerful, loving church.

My point is, the question, "what do you want to be," is all wrong. What do you want to be? Who cares? It doesn't matter. A better question would be, how do you think God is leading you to serve him both now and later? Service to God is the important thing and we all serve him in different ways. What has God called you to do to serve him and are you doing it? Are you taking Eli's advice and saying, "Speak Lord, your servant listens." Or are you so overwhelmed by a thousand

trivial details and so busy trying to make meaningless decisions about life that you are not paying any attention at all to God's voice?

If you are discontent with your life, unsatisfied and constantly struggling to enjoy what you do every day, I suggest that you are not listening to God. I'm not saying that you are necessarily doing the wrong thing. You might be. Maybe you are failing to walk through the doors he is opening for you because that would mean change...I know...it's a dirty word in Lutheran circles. On the other hand, maybe you are right where God needs you to be, but you are not grasping the importance of what you are doing. Sophie Glos, Olinda Sperry's mom was one of my homebound members for years. She complained to me that she felt useless. All she did was move from her bed to her chair and back again. She was bored with TV and couldn't see well enough to read much or do anything else. She didn't really enjoy her food anymore because she had to be so careful with her diet. She felt like there was no point in her being alive. I asked her if she could pray. She said absolutely. So every time I went to see her, I told her about people who needed prayers. For about six years, she was this congregation's official prayer. I kept her posted on new developments and gave her several new things to pray about every month when I went to see her. She was very pleased to know that she had purpose in this life. To have any happiness, we have to have purpose. That's why so many people are miserable.

We live in one of the wealthiest nations in the world. We have more opportunities to do whatever it is we like in a year than most people have in a lifetime. Yet so many people are bored and miserable. You have to have purpose to be content and to have purpose all you have to do is listen to God's call. Eli counseled Samuel to simply reply "speak Lord, your servant listens." The implication is that whatever the Lord wants will be good. We don't have to weigh the Lord's offer against other offers. Whatever he offers is going to be great! Not easy. But great. Likewise, Jesus calls some of his disciples in the Gospel. Will any of them have an easy life? You and I have the perspective of history. We know that they did not lead easy lives or die easy deaths. We think Nathanael was crucified eventually after preaching Christ to many throughout Asia. But as residents of paradise, do you think Nathanael or Samuel would have done it any differently?

You all do many different things with your time in a given day. Whatever you do with your time each day, do it in service to God. Seek his direction. Call upon him for guidance. It does not matter what it is you do, if you do it in service to him you will be blessed and fulfilled. What you do may be seen as important in the world or it may seem worthless to the world. That is of no consequence to you. If you are doing whatever you do in service to God you are fulfilling you calling and you will be greatly blessed, and you will be filled with joy.