

According to an old saying, you can't send a boy to do a man's work. Or can you? God seems to do just that—more than once. In fact, if we were to review God's selection of prophets and leaders throughout the scriptures, God seems to make many curious choices. Consider Jacob, Moses, David, Jonah or Jeremiah; Peter, Paul and Mary. Wait! That would only be the year 1961. We need to go back to around AD 4, AD 33 and AD 36, to “Mary, Peter and Paul.” That's more like it. And then, we go *way* back to about 1000 BC to the boy **Samuel**.

It is a dark time in the history of God's people. We read, “*In those days the word of the Lord was rare*” (1 Samuel 3:1). Eli is getting old and feeble. His sons are pathetic failures, even more than that, they are blasphemers of God.

So who rides in to save the day? Young Samuel. What do we know about Samuel prior to God's call? We know he has a faithful mother, Hannah. Truly, it is Hannah's faith that places Samuel in the care of the priest Eli. We know his mother faithfully visits him year in and year out. We know that Samuel is growing in stature and favor with God and with the people. But that's about it. That's his entire resume. And this is the one who will deliver a message to the people so stunning that it “*will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle*” says verse 11.

How old is Samuel? An ancient historian places him at about 12 years of age. Quite evidently Samuel is not used to hearing the voice of God. Would it otherwise have taken four tries and a suggestion from an old priest to get the communication started between Samuel and God? On the other hand, maybe the old priest isn't accustomed to God's voice, either, if it takes him three tries to set Samuel on the right path.

“*Samuel, Samuel,*” the call goes out. “*Here I am,*” responds Samuel, but he responds to Eli, not to the One who is calling.

“*Samuel,*” the call goes out. “*Here I am,*” responds Samuel a second time to Eli, and a second time incorrectly.

The call goes out a third time, and Samuel responds, “*Here I am.*” Samuel is very consistent in his willingness to serve. But Samuel is still addressing the wrong party. After the third misadventure, Eli instructs the boy, if called again, to answer, “*Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening*” (v. 9).

Sure enough, the call comes a *fourth* time, “*Samuel! Samuel!*” And the line of communication between God and Samuel is opened as Samuel responds, “*Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.*”

As it happens, Samuel listens to a hard message, especially hard for his beloved Eli, whose family will be punished for their iniquity. In the morning Eli asks about the message from God, but Samuel is reluctant to speak the message for fear it will hurt Eli. Eli persists, and Samuel tells it all—his first exercise in telling the truth of God, no matter how difficult it may be. Eli had already heard the same foreboding message from a “*man of God*” if we turn back to the previous chapter. But imagine, a 12-year-old boy delivering a word of judgment to a long-standing priest in the house of the Lord at Shiloh.

And what about today? Is God still choosing people who are young, who can't speak well, and who at times may seem opposed to God's Word? Is God calling someone sitting in this very sanctuary this morning?

Do you recall the Gospel story where Jesus calls his twelve disciples? When we take a look at that group, there is nothing spectacular about them. We know that there are fishermen and a tax collector—quite *ordinary* people. You would think that if Jesus wanted to get something done in a hurry, he would have picked some priests, a few scribes and maybe a handful of lawyers. Maybe Jesus would have included a Roman governor or even an emperor in his group of close disciples. But, no. Jesus seems satisfied to call quite *ordinary* people.

Most of us who worship in this place are also quite *ordinary*. This doesn't preclude the possibility that there could be someone who is quite *extraordinary* among us—like a past or future Olympian, a politician who can touch the lives of thousands, the best surgical nurse in the world, or a millionaire. Surely such people sit among the people of God. Yet most of us claim no great place in history. We do our jobs, we raise our families, we care for our homes, and we go to school—whatever it takes to get through the day.

But God is calling *us*. God is calling us or we wouldn't be here today! When God calls, we tend to be like Samuel and do not hear God's voice correctly. Or we may make excuses like Moses and Jeremiah. Or we may be contrary to the call like Jonah. Yet God calls and calls—and calls.

God's people have been answering his call for thousands of years; for two thousand years we have been answering in the name of Christ. Who is it that teaches the children in our Sunday school? Quite ordinary people whom the Spirit calls and equips. Some people teach Sunday school for 40 years or more. Others go from teaching to some other calling in the church. One pastor I know tells of the Spirit calling him to teach Sunday school, then things developed to the point that he couldn't say no to seminary, and today he is serving as an ordained minister in the church.

Who serves on the Worship team or the Maintenance team or the Mission team? Who provides leadership for the Mom's group or the women's circles? Who accepts a nomination to serve as an Elder on the church's Session? Who goes on Workcamp trips with our high schoolers to assist people whose homes are badly in need of some TLC and who lack the funds to do those needed repairs? Who will leave our congregation to travel to other lands to share the good news with sisters and brothers a world away?

Aren't we all rather ordinary? And do not most of us try to remove ourselves from consideration because we think that we're nothing special? But each one of us is special in the eyes of God. We are baptized and therefore we are *called* by God to let our light shine.

God often chooses terribly ordinary people to do important work. God still chooses people today. No one is too ordinary to be chosen by God—not even you! We are never too young or too old, or too rich or too poor to serve God.

I don't know how you will live out your sacred calling in the days ahead. Perhaps you will begin a new ministry. Perhaps you will re-examine your priorities—the time you spend at work or with your family, the ways you take care of your body or waste precious time on things that are not truly satisfying. Perhaps you will review your financial commitments so as to give more generously to the work of God and to efforts that make an impact in the world for good. And perhaps you will commit yourself anew simply to

knowing Christ better in the days ahead—to discover the ways his Spirit is already stirring your spirit and leading you closer to him.

Whatever else this renewal of God’s call means to you, I pray it also means this: that you know, deep in your own heart, that you belong to God, that you are made part of Christ’s family.

And I pray that you know you are no longer alone, you are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, and by this household of faith.

Finally, I pray that you will confidently feel Christ’s own hand, his presence, his comfort, his power and peace, and that you will be renewed by his strength and filled with his Spirit.

Listen.

Listen.

God is calling.

God is calling *ordinary me and ordinary you*. Amen.