

"YOU CALLED?"

Sermon by Rev. Patty Farr

Based on 1 Samuel 3:1-10 and Clown Skit "Who's Talking?"

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Emmanuel Congregational Church, UCC
119 S. Hamilton St., Watertown, NY 13601
315-782-2650
Email: office@emmanuelchurchucc.org
Website: www.emmanuelchurchucc.org

When I was a child, I liked to play endlessly with my dolls and my stuffed animals. I liked to arrange and rearrange them in my room. They all had a special name and place. I took delight in my belief that when I was away at school for the day, all my dolls and stuffed animals would come to life and make mischief in my room as well as have lots of interesting adventures and also care for each other if any of them got in trouble. I wrote stories about these dolls and their various personalities. I was quite convinced they were very real and alive in their own way, and I believed this long past the time that most children put their dolls away. In fact, in a way I still believe this!

As I reflect on who I have become as a Christian pastor, I find some deep meaning here. As an adult follower of Christ, I believe in a world that cannot be seen or felt with our ordinary senses, a world which is actually more real, however, than the material world that we can see. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." So states the author of Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 1. My fascination with my imaginary world of live dolls and dancing stuffed animals was a sort of dress rehearsal for my ministry today, where I seek to help others as well as myself to come in touch with this wondrous world of the Spirit, a realm of love and goodness and beauty that cannot be seen with the physical eyes but can be known and felt with the heart, a world that cannot be taken away or destroyed, a world that will eventually shape and change the material world in which we live, in short - heaven itself.

What games did you like to play as a child? What were your favorite toys? A little exploration into these questions will reveal a great deal to you about the person God created you to be. Lyman Coleman, a Christian educator, has said, "Childlikeness is very close to Christlikeness." When we explore what was valuable to us in childhood, we begin to touch the essence of our call from God. With this in mind, let's think about the intriguing clown skit we just watched.

The clowns acted out the ancient Hebrew story of 12-year-old Samuel, who had lived in the temple in Shiloh since he was 3 years old. He was apprenticed to the old priest Eli, so that he could become a priest when he became an adult. One night while sleeping in the temple sanctuary, Samuel began hearing his name called. He thought it was Eli calling him. But the old priest knew better. Old Eli was humble and wise enough to know that even though he couldn't hear God's voice, this child Samuel certainly might. With Eli's encouragement, Samuel listened once more and then received a message from God that began to shape his life and the future of Israel from that day forth.

How about you? Have you heard calling your name? It's actually more of a whisper than a shout. And it's more felt than it is heard. Our hearts may not trust that God would call us, because we feel so small and insignificant as human beings. But Jesus told us that it's important to be small. Unless we turn and become like small children, we simply cannot hear and feel what God is saying to us. It is only when we regain the open heart of a child that we begin to hear what God is saying to us.

Think for a moment about the things in your life and in this world that have always excited or inspired you. Think also about what most upsets and saddens you. These are clues to the way God has been calling you since you were a small child. A few weeks ago we celebrated Martin Luther King Sunday. When Martin was 7 years old, the mother of his best friend said they couldn't play anymore, because Martin was black and his friend was white. This broke Martin's heart, but in this tender, broken place, God planted a dream. God's dream was for all people of every race and color to be treated equally and with respect. Martin listened to that dream, and he acted on it. He gave his life to it. What is your dream for the world? God has planted a dream in your heart, too. You must find it. You must act on it, or you will never be happy. You must take one small step each day to help make that dream come true.

One morning while I was making my bed, I unearthed a little book of meditations underneath the foot of the bed that I had forgotten I even owned. I picked up the book and opened it at random to a page that contained the following words: "To love is to listen."

Listening is something that many of us find hard to do. We'd rather talk, we'd rather tell others how we think, how we feel, what our judgments and opinions are. Sometimes when we're in a conversation with someone, we're so eager to share our own thoughts that we miss the very heart of what the other person is saying to us because we're so busy looking for a place to jump in and respond. And when we pray to God, it's often the same thing. We'd rather tell God what we need, and how we think something should be handled, rather than grow quiet and learn to listen in the silence for God's still small voice of guidance.

To love is to listen. The interesting thing is - the author of those words from that little book I found under my bed, Claire Blatchford, is deaf. She lost her hearing overnight at

the age of six as a complication of mumps. But even at that early age, she began to discern a silent *inner voice* that brought comfort and love and could move her to action in a way nothing else could. Many years later, she came to understand this inner voice as the voice of Christ [from Claire Blatchford's book, *Turnings*.]

Claire, a little deaf girl, paradoxically learned to love God and others by listening. How about you? Are you learning to listen? What does God say when you listen? You may find that God is eager to point out some way you can make life better for someone else. God may be wanting to show you how to become less fearful, more generous, less judgmental. God may want to help you make a bigger difference in the world through your love. That's what God's call to you is all about.

Loving God means listening to the Spirit of God spoken through other people, when they speak of their needs, their concerns, their hurts, their longings, their dreams. When we dare to listen in this way, we begin to notice things that we might not want to see. We become aware of the ways we ourselves have mistreated others, family members, co-workers, friends. We also begin to notice those in our culture who have been left out, misunderstood, cast off. We notice the people who are on the fringes, the blessed ones of God who have been treated unfairly just because they are different, or because they are homeless, poverty-stricken, or chronically ill. These were always the first ones that Jesus invited to his table. These were Jesus' sisters and brothers. Jesus was always searching out the lost, the marginalized, the rejected, the forgotten. Where might we be more willing to look here in our own church, in our city streets, and in places where people are suffering around the world, to make sure we are noticing, tuning in, listening and responding in love to the ones whom we or others have overlooked?

When you listen for that still, small voice within, you will get nudges, hunches, clues, maybe in the middle of the night. God's whispers will often come in the form of a directive, "Feed my sheep." "Forgive as you have been forgiven." "Give to the poor." "Love your enemies." You will know you are listening if you become a bit uncomfortable, for this is always the way a call begins - God will urge you to step outside your comfort zone and get involved in some way that you thought was beyond you. God is calling you, just as surely as God called Martin Luther King and the deaf woman Claire and the young boy Samuel. God is calling you. Bless you for listening. Bless you for acting on what you hear.

Let us pray. Dear God, you call us, every hour of every day. You call us to action motivated only by love. You call us to inward transformation. Open our ears and our hearts to heed your call. AMEN.