

## Speak Lord

We begin ordinary time with two stories of being called by God. In the first reading we hear the story of the call of Samuel. Samuel is asleep in the temple, before the ark of the covenant, when he hears his name called out. Naturally he thinks it is Eli who has summoned him. But after Samuel has woken him from a sound sleep a couple of times, Eli tells Samuel that it's the Lord who is calling him, and that he should listen up. Now is this the fruit of Eli's own familiarity with the Lord, or is it an old man's way of getting an eager and excitable young man to leave him alone and let him sleep? Its probably the former, but what do you think?

In any case, Samuel leaves Eli again and when he is awoken again by the sound of his name, he obeys Eli and says "Speak Lord, your servant is listening." And so begins Samuel's life as a prophet. Whether Eli was serious or not, the result is that Samuel does hear the Lord in that voice in the night, and he is not the same again.

In the gospel we hear the story of the calling of the first apostles this time in the person of John the Baptist who points beyond himself to this new prophet they have encountered, Jesus. The two feel drawn to this man they have just met, and their current master, John, remarkably tells them to check him out, to follow their attraction, even if it means leaving him behind. Jesus responds by inviting them to spend time with him and check him out. "Come and see."

How about us? Have we had such an experience, a feeling of being drawn to someone, that has ended up changing our lives? Have we too felt called? Priests and religious are said to follow a calling. In Catholicism we use the Latin and talk about some having a *Avocation* from *vocare*, to call. Luther preached that everyone has a calling, we are all called to serve, whether through our job, or through giving of our time and treasure, or through falling in love, getting married and raising a family. For love too is a calling, a drawing of ourselves outside of ourselves that transforms us.

One of my old mentors, an immigrant philosophy professor from Croatia, who had fled the Nazis as a teenager, used to ask candidates in job interviews. "So, you want to be a college professor. So what do you profess?" I ask something similar of my students. I help them to discern not simply what kind of job they *want*, as if its all up to them, but what kind of work do they feel called to do with their lives. I encourage them to go someplace they hold sacred and pray to God, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening."

Now frequently in the stories of the call of a prophet, the prophet responds by protesting his own unworthiness. ANot me. You do not want me. You do not want to give me that kind of responsibility.@ We feel intimidated, sure we are too frail to be of much use to God, too compromised for God to be calling on us.

But God does not need superheroes to accomplish his mission. He does not need people who can leap tall buildings in a single bound, one for whom bullets bounce off his chest, God needs people like you and I, frail, sinful people who know what it is like to be frail and sinful, to be self-absorbed, angry and frightened. He needs people who know what trauma is like from the inside. He needs people like us to bring his Gospel to *people* like us.

This weekend we commemorate Martin Luther King, an American prophet, called by God through the voices of the racially oppressed and the outcast in our own country. He was criticized as both a reckless firebrand and a whining wimp in his own day by his own enemies. For he was committed to what too many see as opposites: speaking truth to power while also practicing non-violence. He ultimately had faith even in his enemies, that they could be shamed into doing the right thing, that their consciences were not deaf to the call of their own Lord.

This weekend we commemorate one of America's prophets: Martin Luther King. He was a powerful speaker. If you haven't, and even if you have, I recommend listening sometime today or tomorrow to his *I have a dream*@ speech on Youtube in which he called upon America to be true to its better self. He gave that speech on the Washington Mall to the largest crowd ever assembled. I want to close by quoting him in another speech of his in which he spoke directly about being called by God. His words then are as applicable today as they were 60 years ago:

Everybody can be great.  
Because anybody can be of service.  
You don't have to have a college degree to serve.  
You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve.  
You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve.  
You don't have to know the second law of thermodynamics to serve.  
All you need is a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.

May we have hearts full of grace, hearts like Mary, full of grace, Our Lady of the Lake.  
May we have eyes that can see, ears that can hear and hands ready to help serve God's people.