

PROPER FOUR, PENTECOST 2, YEAR B, JUNE 2, 2024

Most of us have asked the questions: “Why am I here?” “What is my purpose?” “What am I supposed to do with my life?” We often wish that the answers would have and still will magically come to us and lead us down the right path to success and fulfillment. In many ways we wish we had the same experience that Samuel had in our first reading where God calls him repeatedly until he realizes it’s God. When he recognizes it’s God, his life and purpose is solidified. Now Samuel isn’t the only person in the Bible who had a similar experience through sound, vision or other senses. Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Isaiah, Mary are just a few who in making themselves available to God had their lives changed. They were given a purpose by God that might not have been what they were hoping for but gave them a life they could not have asked for or even imagined. What their yes response, sometimes reluctantly, in hearing what God was calling them to do transformed them and the world.

We wish it would be that simple. We wish that God would just tell us what we are to do with our lives so we didn’t have to fret about our choices and decisions. But God does speak to us and calls us on a regular basis and it’s really a matter of us listening,

So, let’s go back to the story of Samuel. There is something particularly fascinating about this story that is found in verse 11 when God says, “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle.”

This word tingle is mentioned only three times in the Bible. It is an interesting word with an interesting message. Normally, when we hear, our ears do not tingle. Our ears receive words, and our brain interprets those words, and all of this is part of important communication. But if our ears hear and they tingle something else is going on.

The Hebrew word for tingle also means quiver. Webster says it’s a thrilling sensation and if you look up synonyms for tingle you get prickle, itch, irritation, tickle and sting. What I think it points to is that certain words, and certain moments, trigger physical and emotional parts of us which awaken our senses. It also awakens us to recognize that something significant is happening. What I mean is that it is not just comprehension of some words but that the message is touching us and moving us – our hearts, souls, minds, and wills - in a new, deeper, more significant and altering way.

People from all walks of life for generations have had experiences of lectures, sermons, oratories that have moved them to action. Think about Martin Luther and Martin Luther King Jr, Bishop Tutu and many more memorable persons whose speeches spurred others to take up causes of justice because their ears tingled with the message that moved them to act upon God’s message of love.

When Samuel recognized that it was God speaking, he knew for sure that his life had a particular mission and focus. He would be a leader of God’s people, replacing Eli and working on helping God guide his people to a better destiny. 1st and 2nd Samuel tell this story about God’s people transitioning to a stable, unified, legitimate monarchy.

We all know we live in very complicated times. We wonder about civility and decency, and integrity. Most of us are quite busy juggling priorities, making ends meet. Many of us have creeping health issues or concerns about our loved ones. There is a

lot going on in our lives that gets so much of our energy that sometimes it's difficult to maintain some balance and sanity with worries, health and family issues and more.

And we also live in a contentious world. We have growing disparity between the rich and poor so that there is not only increasing suspicion and animosity among nations but within our own country as well. There is a lot of anger and unrest with our seeming inability to make progress on important issues like climate change, immigration, healthcare, inflation, world peace, and more. What do we do? How can any one of us hear God's voice in the midst of all the cacophony around us?

Just as God spoke to Samuel with a life-changing message that would begin a new thing for God's people, God is speaking to us not just words, but hoping our ears will tingle. And we do not just want to hear; we want our hearts and lives powerfully engaged in a new way so we can keep journeying toward God's purpose for the world. The truth is God is always working on us, shaping us to live and love and serve God better in the world.

As with Samuel we are each part of God's unfolding purposes. And God's presence and purposes are meant to be lived out in all the moments of our lives. God's important calling is not so much WHAT we do, but HOW we do everything.

How do we embody God's presence and care in our homes, in our places of work, as we encounter others?

How do we share God's love and kindness, show God's compassion with those whom we meet each day, with the way we move through the day?

How do we promote God's goodness, stand up for God's justice, advocate for God's grace with the little things and the big things of our lives?

This is what God calls us to be about as disciples, as people who live for the sake of a better world, as people who know God and seek to make God known in the way we live. This is our calling.

I think we all want to help each other have our ears tingle with the loving words and presence of God calling us into our true selves. We want to encourage and cajole each other, to offer our best selves to God's very important work in the world which is spreading love and hope, peace and justice. We want to help each other find ways to live more fully as God's servants to trust God in the hard moments, and share kindness and tenderness, and to advocate for peace and justice in the face of a contentious and complex world. This is how we become all that God made us to be.

In truth, we are like Samuel, who hears God's call but does not understand at first what is expected of him. We need a variety of ways to help us discern whether the voice we are hearing in our lives is from God or our own selfish desires. Remember, the voice of God does not denigrate others, does not blame others for what happens in our lives, does not divide us, does not exclude others. Rather the voice of God calls us to unite, to have compassion, to honor every individual, to respect who each of us is as a unique creation of God. There is a simple way for us to discern how God is calling us to live.

Each day ask yourselves, "Which moment am I most grateful for today?" and, "Which moment am I least grateful for?" Ask yourselves, "When did I give and receive the most love today?" "When did I give and receive the least love today?" What could I have done to turn that around? or, How was I kind to another person today? How was I unkind to someone today. What could I have done differently? How did I show

compassion to a stranger. How did I ignore a stranger or treat them with disdain today? What do I need to do to change my way of thinking to recognize what my faith and God is calling me in how to treat others. Ultimately, ask yourselves does your core faith beliefs not only align with what Jesus taught us but do we honestly embrace them in every aspect of how we live our lives. If we do this on a daily basis we can discern how God is calling us into life.

This is how we get closer and closer to becoming who God calls us to be. Here is how Martin Luther King, Jr put it:

“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’
“Every person must decide whether he/she will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness.”

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.”

May our lives tingle with the presence and promises of God. May we re-dedicate our lives to partnering with God in doing new things that promote the love and justice, the light and hope of Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN