

**- Saint John's Pulpit (January 17, Second Sunday after the Epiphany)
- "When You Are Called" 1 Samuel 3:1-10**

3 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

2 At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; **3** the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. **4** Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" **5** and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. **6** The LORD called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." **7** Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. **8** The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. **9** Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

10 Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Pandemic Culture: Calling & Answering

One of the cultures brought by this pandemic might be calling and answering. Mostly it is from zoom meetings and online classes. If you are parents whose children need to join online classes, how many days did you have troubles to call your children? "Tom, it is time to join your class, wake up and finish your breakfast!" "Hurry-up, you need to log-in soon!"

In their virtual classes, teachers need to call students several times because they need to check out whether students are joining actively. "Mute your microphone, turn on your camera, I cannot see your face!" Students are stressed because they have no idea when their names are called.

A restroom break or snack break shortly in the kitchen? Who knows whether your kids would be called by their teacher at that moment? Always they need to be ready to answer...

What about me? Every Tuesday at 1:30 pm, all clergies in the district should join a zoom check with District Superintendent. Traffic? Driving? Or a long-distance? Unfortunately, these cannot be excused. When DS calls, we should answer, "here I am!" Plus, with graceful smiling without blinking eyes!

Likewise, we live in a world more focusing on calling and answering. If so, what about calling and answering in our faith life? For this question, the text today is like a textbook knowing how to answer in front of God. This story tells how the Lord called Samuel to be a prophet – the prophet who will anoint the first two legitimate kings of Israel.

When God Calls

The one thing we need to know about Samuel from this story is this. We have no idea how old he was. We just assume that he was a little boy mainly from the first verse:

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. 1 Samuel 3:1 NRSV

However, the word 'boy' in Hebrews covers between infant and 40 years old man, so it is hard to know his exact age. Certainly, he was on the way to growing, not an adult which can be seen in verse 19.

¹⁹ As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. 1 Samuel 3:19 NRSV

Where Are We?

Many things around us make us know that we are at the end of this pandemic tunnel. This week, I had a chance to talk to one of the senior congregations. She was so excited and pleased to take a vaccine on that day. Preschool teachers are going to take vaccines soon. So, people begin to say how's going to be in a post-pandemic. For me, one of the key questions is what will happen in churches soon.

Although the post-pandemic is not like what we normally did before the pandemic, the text today clearly says that we need to be near the sanctuary! Although we are going to experience lots of changes in our life,

we will be asked to choose the place between my place and God's place. Let me read 3:1-3 again.

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. ² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³ the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. ¹ Samuel 3:1-3 NRSV

The word of the Lord was rare in those days, visions were not widespread... Don't you think that this is what we exactly see in this world? However, we need to focus on this fact – the lamp of God had not yet gone out (v.3)! God still works for His churches. God wants His people to know that churches are not dormant. They still do their mission for God's kingdom.

One irony from these verses is from a choice made by Eli and Samuel to lie down. Eli, one of the symbolic religious leaders chose to lie down in his room. But Samuel's choice was the temple of the Lord. 1 Samuel 3:7 tells that he was not like Eli clearly, which means was a faith beginner.

⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. ¹ Samuel 3:7 NRSV

One who is likely to know God very well... chose his bedroom.

One faith rookie chose the temple of the Lord.

Here is my personal question. Although Eli's choice was his bedroom, why he did not move to the temple of the Lord? Eli realized that the voice Samuel heard is from the Lord. This means that he got a chance to change his choice, but he didn't do it.

Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹ Samuel 3:8b-9 NRSV

We all have experienced this pandemic since March 2020. It has been almost one year. People have their own interpretation to see this pandemic, but I believe that one of the voices from God in this difficult time is that God wants us to lie down in the temple of the Lord, which means a place of our faith. Regardless of closing a church building, or choosing in-person or on-line service, God wants us to lie down in his place and answer His Call.

It does not matter whether you are like a professional Bible person like Eli, or you are about to believe in God now. The most important thing is that we are now asked to choose the place where we should be. If so, what would you choose? When God calls you, how would you like to answer to His voice?

Please be sensitive to God's calling. Please stop, pay attention, and turn aside. Moses did it too.

⁴ When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Exodus 3:4 NRSV

I have to tell you one interesting point in the Bible. Do you know that the Lord called His people 'twice' by name at a crucial point in their lives?

For Abraham,

¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." Genesis 22:11 NRSV

For Jacob,

² God spoke to Israel in visions of the night, and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am." Genesis 46:2 NRSV

For Moses, (I already shared this verse above, but let's do this again)

⁴ When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Exodus 3:4 NRSV

Finally, for Samuel - Today's hero,

¹⁰ Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." 1 Samuel 3:10 NRSV

Please know that God is calling your name twice now. The only thing you can do is check out your place and say 'YES' I am here! If we keep this thing in mind, even if we meet the post-pandemic, no change in our faith. This is my projection about St. John's in the Post-pandemic! Can you hear a voice from God now? St. John's! St. John's!