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St. Martin's Church, Radnor PA
2 Epiphany, January 15, 2011

If you boil down our scriptural messages this morning, what you have in all its density is the question of call. Samuel is called by God, Jesus calls his disciples. We, in fact, are called into things by God all the time. The issue is, mostly, are we listening and being willing to act and thereby be transformed? But in order to hear the call of God, we have to be in a place where we can hear it. In advent we are asked to prepare a way for the Lord. In Epiphany we are invited into a revelation, the revealing of a mystery.

What both strikes and moves me about our story of young Samuel today is the extraordinary intimacy of an old man and a little boy whispering in the dark of night, as the atmospherics of God's revelation. In this case small Samuel, Shamu-El, meaning "voice of the Lord" or "Hear the Lord," is called into a huge life.

What becomes revealed from this quiet, intimate beginning is that over the course of his life Samuel will be the last of the judges, and establish the new kingdom of Israel. This little kid Sam has no idea what will come of his simple words "Here I am, Lord."

And look at these guys in our Gospel. For me the most remarkable thing about the stories of Jesus calling the disciples is their simplicity. "Come with me." "Ok." These disciples, whatever their backgrounds, just drop everything and do as God, speaking in a language they can clearly understand, in this case Jesus himself, asks them. And it makes all the difference for them. And for us.

This weekend is the celebration of the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. And when I hear the words that Eli gives Samuel in responding to the call, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening," how can I not think of King? He was someone who knew what it meant to listen for the voice of the Lord, and then do what it told him. He was raised in a spiritual tradition that if God says do something, you do it, because we are all being lifted by something greater than any of us. That's kind of the whole idea.

So I began re-reading Dr. King's sermons. And for preachers, let me tell you, it just kinda makes you want to play recordings on Sunday mornings and say "Preach it, Martin, preach it!" He's just so skillful and moving. In one of his lesser-known sermons toward the end he spoke of what made a 3-dimensional life. And I want to share a bit of that with

you. For him, a 3-dimensional life had length, breadth, and height. And this fully experienced life is that to which we are called in order to be God's living body in the world.

For King, the *length* of life "is the inward concern for one's own welfare... that inward concern that causes one to push forward, to achieve his own goals and ambitions." The *breadth* of life "is the outward concern for the welfare of others. And the *height* of life is the upward reach for God." And a full and complete life has all three dimensions in healthy relation to one another.

Now, according to King, some of us get stuck at the first dimension, and care only for ourselves and our own aims. We see people as means to our ends, rather than an end in themselves- fully blessed creations of God. But when we live like this it typically creates broken relationships, alienation, perhaps loneliness. King wrote of the self-centered life, "You reap what you sow. God has structured the universe that way. And he who goes through life not concerned about others will be a subject, a victim of this law."

The breadth of our lives is how we impact for the better the lives of others. King writes, and I partly paraphrase, "And don't forget in doing something for others that you have what you have because of others. We are tied together in life and in the world. And you may think you got all you got by yourself. But you know, before you got out here to church this morning, you were dependent on more than half of the world. In the morning you reach for a bar of soap, and that's handed to you by a Frenchman. You reach over for a sponge, and that's given to you by a Turk. You reach over for a towel, and that comes to your hand from a Pacific Islander. You go on to the kitchen to get a little coffee, and that's poured in your cup by a South American. If its tea maybe its from China and if its cocoa, its probably courtesy of a West African.... Before you get through eating breakfast in the morning, you're dependent on more than half the world. That's the way God structured it. So let us be concerned about others because we are dependent on others."

But King isn't finished. "You know, a lot of people master the length of life, and they master the breadth of life, but they stop right there. Now if life is to be complete, we must move beyond our self-interest. We must move beyond humanity and reach up, way up for the God of the universe, whose purpose changeth not." King felt this third dimension was

the most neglected, with most of us caught up in the busyness of life, not even knowing we are neglecting it. We just get caught up in things. But every one of us, wherever we are on our walk with God, is called to something greater than that. Like Samuel, like the disciples, like Dr. King, we do not know where it will lead. But what we do know we are in the hands of God.

Next Saturday, your vestry and I will be meeting for a day long retreat at the Cathedral. And the subject of the day is “What, as a parish, are we called by God to be now?” And we will be listening for the call of God as it speaks to all of us here, calling us through one another. Into ever deeper relationship with God, the world, and one another

On January 29, we are having our Congregation Sunday, where the parish will design and conduct the service, and we will have a ministry fair at the coffee hour. Same reason. To allow us to broaden our listening of what God calls us to do, personally and corporately in service to this parish, one another, our communities. I can not tell you what you are called to, but I do know that whatever it is, it is part of the Epiphany we are celebrating, the revealing of the will of God, and if we receive it and respond to it, it will transform us into something unimaginably new.

Reading King’s sermons and the scripture for this week made me wonder about our calls, individually and as one body. How they keep evolving, growing, puzzling us, challenging us. It made me wonder about our life, if we are living up to the prophets’ call to get our selves out of way and live fully in God’s world involved in God’s steadfast lovingness. We are, all of us, to be sure, a work in this human progress. And in celebration of King’s life, I will leave you with his words, too seldom heard, about a full, 3-dimensional life leading to new possibilities of faith, call and discipleship.

“Go out this morning. Love yourself, and that means rational and healthy self-interest. You are commanded to do that. That’s the length of life. Then follow that: Love your neighbor as you love yourself. You are commanded to do that. That’s the breadth of life. And I’m going to take my seat now by letting you know that there’s a first and even greater commandment: “Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength. And when you do that, you’ve got the height of life.”

And when you get all three of these together, you can walk and never get weary. You can look up and see the morning stars singing together, and the sons of God shouting for

joy. When you get all of these working together in your very life, judgement will roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream. When you get all the three of these together, the lamb will lie down with the lion.

When you get all three of these together, you look up and every valley will be exalted, and every hill and mountain will be made low; the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places straight; and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh will see it together.

When you get all three of these together, you will recognize that out of one blood God made all men to dwell upon the face of the earth.” But, and this is important, this doesn’t mean God is waiting around for us to get all this together before we see the promised land. It means we are in a living relationship where God makes God’s self known in that process: Our lives are the Epiphany. It’s in the process where we hear the voice of God, calling us into something different we may have been denying, something new we have not yet known, or something exceptional we have never before imagined.

In the name of Jesus and in celebration of all who serve the One Love of the One God, Amen.