**First Reading 1 Samuel 3:1-20**

*At a time when visions are rare and unexpected, the Lord comes to Samuel and calls him to speak the divine word. Though just a boy, Samuel responds to God obediently, as Eli the priest has taught him to respond. This marks the beginning of Samuel’s prophetic ministry. 1Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.*

1Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. 2At 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. 4Then 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. 6The 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.” 7Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. 8The 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. 9Therefore 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. 10Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” 11Then the Lord said to Samuel, “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle. 12On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. 13For I have told him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. 14Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering forever.” 15Samuel lay there until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. 16But Eli called Samuel and said, “Samuel, my son.” He said, “Here I am.” 17Eli said, “What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also, if you hide anything from me of all that he told you.” 18So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. Then

he said, “It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him.” 19As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. 20And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord.

**Psalm139:1-6, 13-18**

1Lord, you have searched me out; O Lord, you have known me. 2You know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar. 3You trace my journeys and my resting-places and are acquainted with all my ways. 4 Indeed, there is not a word on my lips, but you, O Lord, know it altogether. 5You encompass me, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain to it. 13For you yourself created my inmost parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. 14I will thank you because I am marvelously made; your works are wonderful, and I know it well. 15My body was not hidden from you, while I was being made in secret and woven in the depths of the earth. 16Your eyes beheld my limbs, yet unfinished in the womb; all of them were written in your book; my days were fashioned before they came to be. 17How deep I find your thoughts, O God! How great is the sum of them! 18If I were to count them, they would be more in number than the sand; to count them all, my life span would need to be like yours.

**Second Reading 1 Corinthians 6:12-20**

*Paul helps the Corinthians understand that God has claimed the entirety of their lives through the death of Christ. Hence Christian relationships and conduct, including areas of human sexuality, are to reflect the reality that we belong to Christ and that the Holy Spirit lives within us.*

12“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. 13“Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food,” and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. 15Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! 16Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, “The two shall be one flesh.” 17But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. 18Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against

the body itself. 19Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

**Gospel John 1:43-51**

*In John’s gospel, Jesus’ ministry begins with the call of disciples, who then bring others to Jesus. Philip’s friend Nathanael moves from skepticism to faith when he accepts the invitation to “Come and see.”*

43The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” 44Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” 46Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” 47When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” 48Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” 49Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” 50Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” 51And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

**Sermon**

 Last week in Confirmation class, the self-named God Squad learned about prophets. I think there is a lot of confusion these days about what a prophet actually does. There is too much focus on the idea of prophecy as predicting the future. Certainly, some of the words and writings of prophets talk about what will happen in the future. But for the most part, prophesy in the Old Testament was based on the actions of God’s people…if God’s people continued in their sinful ways, their actions would lead to destruction because their ways were evil.

 But last year, I was viewing a video-based curriculum about prophets led by Walter Bruggeman, and Bruggeman had a brilliant way of talking about the prophets and their work. He said that a prophet’s job was to help God’s people image the world as God would have it, which was extremely different from how humanity generally functioned. Through the word of

the Lord, the prophets speak to God’s people to spur God’s people toward the description of life and the world as God would have it rather than constantly living according to the ways of humanity. In this case then, their main purpose was not to predict the future. Their purpose was to call God’s people back to God and God’s ways. The prophetic message was not directed at people who didn’t believe in God; it was specifically for God’s people, to impact the actions of God’s people.

 Today’s passage from 1 Samuel is the story of the calling of the prophet Samuel. In this story, Samuel is only a young boy, and he is serving under the priest Eli. Eli and his sons were in charge of managing the sacrificial life of God’s people. But it turns out that Eli’s sons were breaking some rules and taking some of the meat sacrifices for themselves or expecting the people to give extra for their own use. God calls Samuel to the work of God’s prophet, though it isn’t an easy or desirable job. But it is good news for God’s people because God has seen the way that Eli’s sons have had no regard for God and have acted selfishly in relation to God’s people. God basically tells Samuel that this reign of wickedness ends now. In doing this, the wickedness will stop and God’s ways will be restored. God communicates God’s plan through the prophet Samuel.

 Samuel has a bit of trouble, at first, figuring out who is calling him, from where the voice is coming. Eli eventually realizes that it is God trying to communicate with young Samuel, so he finally gives him instruction on what to do, “Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” Once Samuel responds in this way, the LORD speaks and Samuel “meets” God, and receives the message that he is to pass along to Eli. And, quite possibly, Samuel may be sorry he responded and listened because the message is not at all something he wants to pass along to his mentor Eli.

 This is a great passage to help us consider the roll that listening plays in living out our faith. We have lots of questions to bring to God…we have lots of concerns and complaints to lift before God. Our God is certainly a God who hears all of these. But don’t forget, our God is also someone who has something to say about the matters in our lives and in the world, particularly where God sees wickedness and corruption, as in the case of Eli’s sons. And how often do we stop and say, “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening”?

 Do we take the time to listen for God? Or would we rather do all the talking. Do we take the time to listen for God? Or do we just have too much else going on that we just don’t have the time? Do we take the time to listen for God? Or would we rather listen to those with whom we agree, listen to those who are loud, opinionated and don’t care what anyone else says or thinks. Do we take the time to listen for God? Or are we afraid of what God is going to say…do we think that God might possibly say something that will makes us squirm…do we think that we might found out that we are wrong once again, that decisions are going to be harder than we originally thought, that we may have to repent or change course or even do something we’ve never done before.

 What is at risk when we listen for God’s word to us? We are just a few weeks into a new year and have many decisions ahead of us. Some of these decisions are everyday decisions, some are once every so often decisions…some may be small-scale decisions, some may have large-scale consequences…some may affect only our own lives, some may effect the lives of others. Certainly, as the church, we are also called collectively to listen to God to guide us in our decisions as a congregation that can have an impact on our community and our neighbors who are hurting or struggling in any type of need.

 This story of the calling of Samuel is a great reminder that what we are called into is a relationship with a living God from whom we should expect to hear. Our faith is a relationship into which God calls us…the conversation is a two-way street. And sometimes we will hear from God something that we didn’t really want to hear or deal with. But that is part of being the human being in the God-human relationship. God provides us that guidance, that glimpse, that reminder of how God’s ways really are in contrast to the ways that humanity, the world operates. Sometimes in it in quiet moments when we intentionally stop to listen to what God has to say, sometimes it is through present-day prophets, though we have to be very discerning about who we consider a prophet these days.

 In our class last week, we discussed one modern prophet, whom we celebrate tomorrow, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I played for the class a portion of his, “I Have A Dream” speech, and it was a great example of a prophet describing how God intends things to be even though they are not that way as he spoke. Into the midst of racial injustice and segregation, King spoke of a day when the sons of former slaves and the sons of slave owners

in Georgia would be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood…that one day his own children would not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character…that one day in Alabama, little black boys and little black girls would be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. King spoke of these things that were far from his present reality and, using biblical language in other parts of his speech, cast this vision as the picture of things according to God’s ways. It was a speech intended to spur the listener to live into this vision, to take steps to make it happen.

 The prophetic word of God is in our midst, inviting us to open our ears and hearts to perceive its truth. The vision that it casts pulls us away from business-as-usual to inspire faith that believes that God can make a difference in our broken world with the work of love, justice, reconciliation, and peace for those who need it most. Amen.