

**"Hearing God's Call" -- a Sermon by Gary R. Hindman, FPCUC.
Scripture: 1 Samuel 3:1-10, 19-20.**

Text: "Speak, for your servant is listening." --1 Samuel 3:10

A while back the San Francisco "Examiner" featured the story of a retiree who claimed he heard the voice of God. A longshoreman most of his life and addicted to alcohol, he was at a critical juncture when he decided to ask for help and heard a little voice say, "Go buy a broom and a cart and sweep the streets around Mission High School!" So he did.

He took such joy in sweeping the streets around Mission High School that he quit drinking and started smiling and students by the score took him as their surrogate grandfather and he was greatly blessed in being a blessing to that part of the city. He heard God's call.

A friend once told me that when she was in college she had the strongest urge to go visit one of her professors who was hospitalized with cancer. Later she became convinced that the inner urge she was feeling was prompted by the Holy Spirit for the visit to her professor, a practicing Christian, led her to a wonderful friendship and way of service. She was a great blessing to her professor in the last months of his life and in turn she was blessed for she came into an intimate time of his life and learned to see, not only how a Christian lives, but how a Christian dies. Thanks to God's leading she was a blessing to a dying man who blessed her spiritual life beyond measure.

Many times in my ministry people have told me that they have heard the voice of God or have felt God moving in their life. Admittedly, we are sometimes reluctant to share such stories because they are so personal and subjective but many of us have had such experiences and they are a great source of inspiration.

But, not all the voices we hear are of God; some come from the opposite side from heaven! When former Beetle John Lennon was killed by Mark David Chapman, for instance, Chapman's excuse for pulling the trigger was that he kept hearing a voice inside his head saying, "Do it! Do it! Do it!" Hearing voices can be confusing or a blessing or both as we will see in the calling of Samuel.

Like Chapman, Samuel heard a voice three times, but I am certain his was a voice from God because the outcome was so good. Samuel was a boy in the service of the prophet Eli in a time when the Scriptures say, "the Word of the Lord was precious (for) there was no frequent vision." People were not listening; they were not hearing; and they did not feel called.

But Samuel heard the voice. To be sure he was confused at first and thought it was old Eli calling for help in the early hours just before dawn. He had to hear three times before he got it right but eventually he would say what was in his heart: "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears."

Have you ever heard the voice of God calling you? Are you called in what you do? Are you where you should be in your life? Are you where God would have you be--doing what God would have you do?

These are the questions that come to mind in the reading of today's lesson because, (first) **every worthwhile endeavor in life is potentially a calling from God.**

We didn't always believe that. Theologians in the Middle Ages read how Adam was condemned to work as a penalty for his sins and taught that work is a form of punishment. In Genesis, chapter three, it does appear that Adam's work is made difficult because of his sin; but in Genesis two it is clear that God intended Adam's work to give his life meaning and purpose.

To this day there are those who believe work is punishment and the only true "calling" is a calling into full-time Christian service. But Martin Luther set us straight on that point. Always the earthy one, Luther once said God may be more pleased with the man who shovels manure and the woman who milks cows than with a monk who spends his day praying and singing psalms if that's all he does and does it only for himself and himself alone!

Luther would say "God milks the cows through you; God cleans the floor through you; God picks up the trash, through you." There are some lawyers in this country who cannot possibly be called by God. They are not interested in justice or fairness under the law; there are some teachers in this country who cannot be following the voice of God. They are too tired and cynical to be of help to their students. Sadly, there are preachers who are no longer called by God. Somewhere along the way they lost all inspiration and people lost confidence in them as their spiritual leader.

But there are lawyers who care about justice and equality under the law. There are teachers who care a great deal about their students and inspire them to greatness. There are preachers who are following the voice of God and who have stayed true to their vows and their godly purpose.

Every worthwhile endeavor is potentially a calling from God. And this leads to the second point: **attitude is more important than the work itself.**

For over 30 years the bathroom attendant at New York's "Club 21" has been a man named Otis Coles. He was interviewed in a newspaper for the great job he was doing and made a comment to this effect: that he truly enjoyed making the bathroom a clean, pleasant place. He then said, "I know it sounds funny, but I think it is God working through me."

We have no idea how many people we affect by the special way we do everyday things. For example, about 30 years ago Barbara and I were in a cafeteria in Las Vegas. It was a very busy place and we were there for only about a half hour. But there was a

Sermon, January 15, 2006, page 3

waiter there whose name was Sabo. I never saw him before and I will probably never see him again. But I will never forget him. He was such a hard worker and tried in every way to please the hordes of people flocking into the cafeteria. He had the most wonderful attitude so that I later I commented to Barbara and our friends Tom and Mary Anne and said, "I wonder if God placed Sabo here just to cheer up all the people who come in after losing at the casino!"

With the right attitude we can make any job a calling and a blessing. But moreover, the surplus from our livelihood can be a double blessing when it is shared with others in church and charity. Supposing, for instance, you were a tither and that you found a way to give back to God one tenth of your livelihood. You could build a quiet purpose to you life that would make it very meaningful. You could think of every tenth dollar, every tenth step, every tenth word, every tenth move you made as going back to God, the great Giver and Source of all! To me it's a sublime thought and one I have returned to many times.

Every worthwhile endeavor is potentially, a calling from God.
Attitude is more important than the work itself.

Finally, **our ultimate commitment must be to the Kingdom of God.**

Our whole life can be a vocation if we see it as an extension of God's ultimate purpose for this world. If we can see God's Spirit alive in the world, if we can see God's love working in the world, if we can then see ourselves working on the side of God's Spirit of Love, it can be a powerful force to strengthen and bless our lives.

Unfortunately, the statistics I read today about why young people are motivated to get a college education tend to be shallow and cynical. There seems to be a dearth of idealism and a lot of young people interested merely in making money so they can have a comfortable life. Our youth, in fact all of us, need to be challenged to do better than that!

One young man left college to join the Unification Church. He became a "Moonie". When asked why he said, "My father only talks about getting a college education and a good job and making a lot of money. Reverend Moon talks to me about helping him save the world!"

In John Piper's new book entitled *Don't Waste Your Life*, he devotes a chapter to the idea of searching for a single passion to live by and quotes a simple poem that indicates what he thinks that passion should be: "Only one life, 'Twill soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last."

When Marge Carpenter was Moderator of the General Assembly of our Presbyterian church, many of us were treated to some great stories of Christian lives that were anything but wasted. A newspaper woman by training, Marge was given a special grant to travel the four corners of the world to search out and write about the mission work of missionaries of our own Presbyterian Church.

Listening to her stories made me realize that every day we have missionaries "responding to the voice of God" and risking their lives to feed the hungry in Somalia or take care of the sick in Pakistan or Bangladesh. Presbyterian missionaries were a great influence on leaders in the Communist North Korea—maybe their influence will do more than anything else to gradually help that troubled nation out of its plight.

Presbyterian missionaries were among the last to leave China after World War II, but they left behind a little known remnant of a 1/2 million people that has grown today, to untold millions of Christians--the fastest growing Christian Church in the world! We have missionaries in such remote areas that you can't get there without a helicopter! We're the only medical presence in some countries; the only alternative to insurrection and revolution in some others. But the truth is, we also have mission right here on our doorstep in Upland and each one of us can be an instrument of God to share the good news with others.

Samuel was called to be a priest to the people. Some of us hear the call and respond to full-time Christian service. But I believe each of us has a calling from God--where we live, where we work, where we play, where we study and grow. Our work place, in fact our very lives, can be a cathedral for God--a place where the good news is seen and heard through you as you spread the Gospel by how you live and love in God's name.

With our ears we should say, with Samuel, "Speak, for your servant is listening." With our voice we should say, "Here I am Lord, send me."