

## **HOW CAN YOU TELL GOD IS CALLING YOU?**

**Mark 1:16-20**

**Preached by Dr. Cahill**

**Babcock Presbyterian Church**

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Last Sunday's sermon was based on the story of Samuel's, when he was still a boy, first encounter with God. Three times Samuel heard a voice calling out to him in the night. Three times Samuel thought it was his mentor Eli calling his name and three times Eli told Samuel it wasn't him. But that third time Eli also counseled Samuel to say, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." (Samuel 3:8-9)

I went on to say God is forever calling out, speaking your name and my name followed by his revelation of his will so we can conform our behaviors and attitudes to God's unfolding plan for our lives. Therefore it is essential we develop the fine art of listening so we can hear that same voice calling us to be someone or do something important for God.

I also said it's important to learn how to tell the difference between God's voice and all the other competing voices vying for our attention. How do you tell the difference?

One way is to be in Christian community so we can help each other listen for God. Remember, the Lord called Samuel when Eli was available to help Samuel recognize who was speaking to him. This should tell us something. If we are ever going to mature in our faith and practice, we need each other to help us figure things out. Just as Samuel needed Eli's wisdom and insight so he could recognize and respond to God's voice we need the support of the beloved community just as much, if not more so.

When I was done preaching the sermon I thought I covered everything until afterward I was asked, "How can you tell if something really is God's will?" I quickly answered, "Oh, I'm covering that next Sunday."

So today I will address the question, "How do you tell if a calling to do or be something is really what God wants?"

In the story, Fordham and the Seven Scrolls, young Fordham is facing a spiritual crisis. He believes he's been called to be a monk and enter the monastic life but at the same time, being the oldest son, he is convinced he is expected and obligated to take over the family farm when the time comes.

His teacher and mentor Brother Bede, who also experienced the same dilemma when he was younger, seeks out Fordham when he is told Fordham's recent inappropriate behavior is due to his agonizing inner struggle over his calling.

Brother Bede, with the help of Fordham's best friend Erwin, finds an excuse to corner Fordham, who has been avoiding Bede, so he could help the young man find the courage to face his father with his calling to enter the monastery.

"I tell you the truth Fordham," Bede began, "for the past couple of months the closer you came to your graduation the more I noticed a big change in you. You seem to be carrying all the troubles of the world on your young shoulders..."

Feeling trapped and set up, Fordham didn't respond to Bede so the old monk scratched the back of his head before continuing.

"Fordham, I'd like to tell you my story...and I'm sharing it with you if only because I believe we have something in common."

Suddenly Fordham had the frightening thought that somehow old Bede could read his mind or that God told Bede in a dream about his darkest secrets.

"May I tell you my story?" Bede asked.

Fordham only nodded.

Bede then proceeded to tell Fordham that he was the spoiled son of a wealthy merchant and expected to inherit the family business, make a lot of money and live a life of pleasure. But God had other ideas. One night young Bede woke up in a sweat. He dreamed the Lord spoke to him, telling him he was one of God's beloved sons and he was born for the monastery.

The next morning Bede tried to laugh it off but even though that inner voice kept nagging him, he decided to go his merry way and as planned went to work for his father. He had every luxury and advantage anyone could ever hope for, but deep down he was miserable.

Over time he became an alcoholic. Not surprisingly his self-centered behaviors turned off the woman he was going to marry, and she left him. Bede wasn't brave enough to face himself until one day thirty years later he finally gave up and surrendered to God and did what he should have done thirty years earlier.

"So you went into the monastery?" Fordham asked.

"More than that, I submitted to God's will," replied Bede.

"But how can you tell if something really is God's will?" Fordham asked?

"I think you already know," smiled Bede. "You have a growing conviction that gnaws at you but reassures your heart at the same time. It grabs you by the scruff of the neck and

refuses to let go, like a dog holding on to a bone and you are the bone. You might deny it, maybe even curse it, but in the end you have to face it or you'll stay lost in your delusions forever.

Fordham somehow knew everything Bede said was true but he feared he was beyond hope.

"How do you face it? he asked desperately. "What if you have obligations to your family and you're expected to honor those obligations?"

"Like taking over your father's farm when the time comes?"

Hearing Bede say this, Fordham was taken aback knowing Bede knew this but that didn't stop him.

"Yes, but how do I face my father and tell him I'm walking out on the family?"

Bede grew silent and again scratched the back of his head like he always did when thinking deeply.

"Fordham, you recognize that concern but you also test it because what you think is true could come from a mistaken notion not based in reality. Think of it this way. Did your father ever demand that you follow in his footsteps or else?"

Fordham thought for a moment.

"Never...but he always talks like I'm going to do it."

"I wonder Fordham, what would happen if you told your father you had other plans for the future. What would happen to the farm then?"

"I guess (my younger brother) Wyatt could carry on."

Bede went silent again for the longest time before waiting for Fordham to speak up again.

"I wish I came to you earlier. I'm not saying I've made any decision yet..."

"There's no rush, Bede said, "sleep on it, pray about it, even talk about it with someone you trust..."

"Grandpa!" Fordham thought.

“Above all,” cautioned Bede, “listen carefully for the voice of God and when you hear it then act on it.”

“But what if you discover after you act on it that it isn’t God’s will after all?”

Bede smiled with his familiar grin and said, “Then stop doing it.” Oh look, here comes Erwin.”

Perhaps Fordham’s crisis of faith speaks to you. Then again perhaps not. Even so, sooner or later if you take God seriously you will be confronted by the demands of the Gospel and you will have to decide whether to answer the call or not.

The way Mark tells it, when Jesus came upon Andrew, Simon, James and John casting their nets in the sea, immediately, without delay they dropped everything and followed Jesus.

Why was it so easy for them to leave everything behind to go with Jesus? Although Mark doesn’t tell us, it’s probable these four fishermen already heard Jesus preach numerous times and it’s most likely they even had intimate conversations with Jesus not realizing that Jesus was all the while sizing them up. If that’s the case, it’s also very probable that Andrew, Simon, James and John were enchanted with Jesus and being flattered to be chosen to be his first disciples they jumped at the chance to be on the ground floor of this exciting new movement led by Jesus of Nazareth.

Of course their real struggles and crisis of faith would come later as they slowly learned from Jesus about the cost of discipleship, especially after Jesus told them he was going to Jerusalem to be crucified for the sins of the world. That’s when their doubts and fears first surfaced only to come to a head on Good Friday when they all deserted Jesus and ran away to save their necks. But what did Jesus say earlier? “If you try to save your life, you will lose it, but if you lose your life for my sake and the Gospel will save it.”

I believe this is true, whenever you hide from God and deny the call to take on something important or do something hard that will disrupt your nice comfortable life, you will soon get lost in your delusion that you are the “captain of your ship and the master of your fate.” But even more critical whether you know it or not you are in danger of losing your humanity. It may sound harsh but it’s true.

What is God calling you to do, who is God calling you to be, right now? And when God expects you to do something for him in the near future that might seem messy, uncomfortable and maybe even dangerous how will you answer? And if you try to block out the voice of God what do you think will be the consequences?

On the other hand, if you do swallow hard and say, “Yes, Lord, I will trust you with my life and do whatever you ask,” do you think that even though you suspect what is being asked

will be a sacrifice of your time and talents and even your security that God will bless and keep you in ways you never imagined?

There's only one way to find out, so next time God calls you in the night why not say, "Here I am, Lord, I will follow if you lead me, I will hold your people in my heart."