***CALLED TO…***

John C. Peterson

Covenant Presbyterian Church, Staunton, VA

January 14, 2018

Texts: 1 Samuel 3:1-18 and John 1:43-51

 Last week we heard the voice of John the Baptist calling out in the wilderness: *Repent!* This week we hear two more voices calling out: the voice of God calling: *Samuel!* and the voice of Jesus calling: *Follow me!* While John’s voice was calling all people to repent of their sins, the voices we hear today are focused calls toward particular persons for particular purposes, the voice of God calling Samuel to be a prophet of the Lord and the voice of Jesus calling Philip to follow him as a disciple. Neither of those particular calls was anticipated – in Samuel the writer goes so far as to say, “the word of the Lord was rare in those days;” the calls come out of the blue – or in the case of Samuel, out of the black of night. It seems to be God’s persistent practice to act at unexpected times in unexpected places and to call unexpected people. The list is long and varied from Noah, Abraham and Sarah in Genesis to Saul who became Paul after his conversion on the Damascus Road 1500 years later. God calls who God will call at a time of God’s choosing.

 In his book *Pastor as Minor Poet*, Craig Barnes suggests that “calling begins with identity, not task…if we aren’t clear about who we are, we’ll never know what to do with our lives.”[[1]](#endnote-1) Samuel was called to be a prophet, one who proclaimed the word God gave him to proclaim; at first that call was unclear as Samuel failed to recognize the voice of God calling to him in the night. But once recognized, Samuel heard God’s call and accepted his role as a prophet of the Lord, chosen to bear a word from the Lord to God’s people and, in time, to anoint for God two kings – Saul and David. Philip was called to be a disciple, not only to follow Jesus, but also to learn from him, live as he showed Philip how to live, and serve as he showed Philip how to serve. Philip’s identity became that of disciple – a disciple of Jesus Christ.

 If, as Barnes suggests, calling begins with identity, then who are you? In what is your identity rooted? Is it rooted in your Christian faith or is it rooted in your chosen profession or your ethnicity or your American nationality or a political party or in the team you are loyal to? In what or in whom is your identity to be found? In the 139th Psalm, the psalmist says that God knows us better than we know ourselves, knows everything about us, knows our hearts and our minds and our intentions good and bad. Throughout Scripture we are urged to ground our identity in God, to be God’s people – that was the substance of God’s covenant with Abraham and with Moses. With the coming of Jesus God is claiming us all as God’s own and rejecting all the other ways in which we try to establish our identity; Paul puts it this way: “there is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, for all are one in Christ Jesus.” Our identity, the identity from which we derive our calling, is as disciples of the risen Christ. Anything else is idolatry!

 From those whose identity is in Christ, God calls particular people for particular forms of service. The folks who come today to be ordained and/or installed have been called by God to the holy office of elder. They have not been called to a particular task, though there are a host of tasks for which they will bear responsibility. They have been called to be elders for this church. It is not a higher calling; it is simply a calling that asks of them humble obedience to allow God to work through them as leaders for God’s church. They were not asked if they were willing to serve as elders; they were asked if they discerned God’s ***call*** to serve as elders. In saying “yes”, they confirm their willingness to let God work through them, to seek to do what God wants done in this particular place at this particular point in time, to be leaders who are led by the Holy Spirit.

 Cardinal Leo Joseph Suenens, the late prelate of Brussels, is said to have whispered something into the ears of new priests at their ordination ceremonies. What words of wisdom or blessing did the Cardinal whisper? Just these: “Remember, God has called you to the priesthood because he does not trust you to be a layman.”[[2]](#endnote-2) Priest and layman alike, elder and clergy, ordained and unordained, all are called to be disciples whose lives reflect the love of Christ and the joy of being God’s people. Today we ordain and install those who have answered a particular call to a particular form of service as elder. God has already been at work, shaping that identity as a disciple of Christ that has made them open to God’s call. Hear then, in their own words, their description of what God has been doing and the call God has extended to them – by day or by night.

*Every time I started writing my statement of faith, I repeatedly wrote “blessed” because I have truly lived a blessed life. So I decided to start each element of my statement with, “I am blessed…” [Among those blessings] I am blessed to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, to follow Jesus Christ in obedient discipleship and to use the gifts and abilities God has given, honoring and serving God in every aspect of my personal life. (Janie Ballurio)*

*I begin every prayer and meditation, “Creator I gratefully ask that you fill me with light.” I end with “goodness to all concerned and Thy will be done.” I strive to keep these statements true in my life – by word, by action and in thought. Some days I am more successful than others. (Rebecca Allison)*

*The abstract notions of the creator God and the present but external Christ, do not, by themselves, animate a Christ-like life. And without God’s present help, my continual failure to live according to Jesus’ example would lead me to despair of trying. But…I believe that the Holy Spirit, God’s immanent presence in the world and the source of all truth, provides the renewing inspiration to follow Christ, striving to live out Jesus’ charge to love God and neighbor. (Kevin Luebke)*

*In my early 20’s I started to find the God I know now. My God wasn’t quick to judge, but was quick to forgive. My God loved all and wanted Creation to show God’s love to one another.... I started in this time to feel the presence of the Holy Spirit – never so much as when I was working for social justice or when I was celebrating God’s love and grace with other people of faith. My faith journey takes me to this point – where I finally feel I have found a home in a church that allows me to believe in a God that loves all no matter our race, socioeconomic status or who we choose to love, a God that is experienced when we demonstrate a small portion of Jesus’ love to one another. (Kristin Siegel)*

*God was watching over us. As I look back over those difficult years, God answered our prayers; God could not directly fix this problem, but God gave us the strength and courage to do what was right… (Richard Beard)*

*Thankfully my faith journey has taken me to understand that God does continue to forgive us through our trust in Jesus Christ. I made a huge promise to God years ago…and I didn’t keep my vow. Through much prayer I feel assured that God does forgive …sometimes trying your best doesn’t bring the results you hope for. I strongly believe that I still have many miles to go in my faith journey and continue to work to be ever closer to God and to understand the plan for my life. (Jenni Campbell)*

*I believe that God calls us not only to be in relationship with him, but also to be in relationship with each other. As an introvert, this is something that I have to be intentional about. Because of this, I know that the moments I am working hard to be in community with others – are moments when I am serving God. (Laura Lawson)*

*As I reflect on the many places I have worshiped, the one constant has been God – the same God – no matter where I was. God has been my anchor in a sea of changes. I have accepted God’s call to be a servant on the Session. I look forward to the doors He opens, the angels I find in human flesh, and the Holy Spirit’s guidance in all that I do and say. (Jane Wimmer)*

 These are statements of faith from those whom God has called to serve as elders, folks whose identities are grounded in Jesus Christ. Where then is your identity grounded? If not in Christ, then where? What difference might it make for you to see yourself first and foremost as a disciple of Jesus Christ? Might it make you kinder, more loving, more hopeful? Might you then recognize the voice of God speaking to you

in the night or by the light of day,

 when you are hard at work or asleep in a pew,

 in the still of early morning or amid the cacophony of a crowd? If you think it possible that the voice you hear, which may be an audible whisper or a tug at your conscience or the moving of your heart, might be God speaking to you, how will you respond? Will you ignore it or dismiss it as heartburn or might you respond as old Eli suggested, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” Are you ready to listen, for God just may be calling you – to something new! Amen

1. M. Craig Barnes, *The Pastor As Minor Poet*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2009, p.102 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. M. Craig Barnes, *The Pastor As Minor Poet*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2009, p.48 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)