

1 Samuel 3:1–10, (11–20)

I am confident that God has called me to this place. I know it in my bones. I have told you the pomegranate story, and it has been confirmed by experience, and by the nominating committee and the bishop who asked me to come... That is clear, but the next question for me is, “Who am I?” And then, “Whose am I?”

“What is my unique contribution to this place?”

I am not you. I am not Nikolai. I am not one of the previous deans. I am me. I could do so many different things. I could try to please all of you all of the time but that is impossible!

My calling, my vocation, is to be my true self, to use the gifts God has uniquely given me and to be present in this place.

And that is your calling as well: be your true self, to use the gifts God has uniquely given you and to be present in this place..

As we find our uniqueness we will create a community that invites the larger community to discover its unique calling as well.

So, who am I? What is important to me? What do I value?

You will have learned something of this these past few years. I am someone who cares about people, someone who wants to enable others to grow in their relationship with God. I want to create beautiful liturgies and quiet days and meditation, to offer space for people to listen to God. Preaching is important, visiting the sick is important, challenging unjust behaviour is important, enabling people to grow and flourish is important, prayer is paramount, so it is important for me to listen, to listen for the still small voice of God, to listen to you, to listen to the voices of the voiceless in this community.

My call is the call to life, to freedom, to love, to sharing the intimacy of relationships with God and with others. It is also about embodiment, about being a God person and imaging the divine in my humanity.

And you, who are you? What is important to you? What do you value?

Parker Palmer says: *Vocation does not come from wilfulness. It comes from listening. . . . That insight is hidden in the word vocation*

*itself, which is rooted in the Latin for “voice.” Vocation does not mean a goal I pursue. It means a calling that I hear. . . . I must listen for the truths and values at the heart of my own identity.*¹

The book of Samuel is set in the context of failed leadership and communal chaos.

This week’s passage opens with two statements – that Samuel was ministering under Eli and “the word of [God] was rare, visions were not widespread.” Both are important for what follows.

When God calls to Samuel, he and Eli both fail to understand that it is God calling. This should not come as a surprise – after all, the word of God was rare and visions not widespread. Samuel had no previous experience on which to go. In the end, it is Eli, the priest who is already judged, who guides Samuel so that he can discern the presence and the message of God. It is Eli who encourages Samuel to speak, even though he was aware that the word was likely to be one that confirmed his family’s own demise.

Through the wise mentoring of Eli, Samuel was able to respond to God, a response that resulted not only in change for Samuel and Eli but also for the whole of the people of Israel. Under the leadership of Samuel, Israel moves from a loose association of tribes to a unified nation under the leadership of a king. The guidance of Eli prepared the way for the young Samuel to hear the word of God for a new time and a new place. Encouraging Samuel to speak heralds a time of great change.²

Jesus too challenged complacency. He put his emphasis on love and compassion over law.

In the minds of most people, a “call” is for someone to enter into some form of ministry, especially into ordained ministry. We are all, each person, each community, called to a life of faith and called to listen and to discern the voice and message of God. It is not easy sometimes.

Parker Palmer writes:

¹ Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (Jossey-Bass: 2000), 4.

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How much dissolving and shaking of ego we must endure before we discover our deep identity—the true self within every human being that is the seed of authentic vocation. . . .

Today I understand vocation, he says . . . not as a goal to be achieved but as a gift to be received. Discovering vocation does not mean scrambling toward some prize just beyond my reach but accepting the treasure of true self I already possess. Vocation does not come from a voice “out there” calling me to become something I am not. It comes from a voice “in here” calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfil the original selfhood given me at birth by God.³

I wonder how Samuel would describe his experience?

Howard Thurman, theologian and civil rights leader ⁴ wrote:
Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.

Frederick Buechner defines vocation as “the place where your deep gladness meets the world’s deep need.” ⁵

This concept is not selfish, but real. The Quaker teacher Douglas Steere used to say that the ancient human question “Who am I?” leads inevitably to the equally important question “Whose am I?”—for there is no selfhood outside of relationship. . . .⁶

As I learn more about the seed of true self that was planted when I was born, I also learn more about the ecosystem in which I was planted—the network of communal relations in which I am called to live responsively, accountably, and joyfully with beings of every sort. Only when I know both seed and system, self and community, can I embody the great commandment to love both my neighbour and myself. . . .⁷

³Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (Jossey-Bass: 2000), p10 in <https://cac.org/swallowed-by-a-whale-2018-05-30/>

⁴ Howard Thurman, occasion unidentified. This often-used quotation is attributed to Reverend Thurman on the history page of the Howard Thurman Center for Common Ground at Boston University, <https://www.bu.edu/thurman/about/history/>.

⁵ Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC* (HarperSanFrancisco: 1993), 119.

⁶ Richard Rohr - <https://cac.org/who-am-i-2018-05-28/>

⁷ Rohr

The world still waits for the truth that will set us free—my truth, your truth, our truth—the truth that was seeded in the earth when each of us arrived here formed in the image of God. Cultivating that truth, I believe, is the authentic vocation of every human being. ⁸

Bill Plotkin writes:

*Discovering your unique gift to bring to your community is your greatest opportunity and challenge. The offering of that gift—your true self—is the most you can do to love and serve the world. And it is all the world needs.*⁹

One sign that something is your vocation is that you would do it for free, even if there is no reward or social payoff. This clarifies a vocation quite quickly.¹⁰

As conscious human beings, our life purpose is to be a visible expression of both the image and the likeness of God. Each of us reveals a unique facet of the divine. ¹¹As we say each week:

**Come Holy Spirit breathe through us:
Enable us to know and make known
the connection between You and the everyday.**

..

**Enable us to show Christ's unconditional love in action.
This we ask in Jesus name, Amen**

So, how do we discern the voice of God in our time?
Is it a gut feeling, a sense, an audible voice, a vision?
For me it has sometimes been a feeling in my stomach, sometimes a sense, sometimes also hindsight is a wonderful teacher.. for some here there are visions, .. some have experienced healing outside the medical system through prayer..

⁸ Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (Jossey-Bass: 2000), 11, 15,16-17, 36

⁹ Bill Plotkin, *Soulcraft: Crossing into the Mysteries of Nature and Psyche* (New World Library: 2003), 13.

¹⁰ Rohr

¹¹ See Richard Rohr's previous meditations on "Thisness," <https://cac.org/thisness-weekly-summary-2018-03-24/>

always my listening needs to be tested against scripture, past experience and the tradition of the church.. Samuel's revelation though shocking, rang true.. and was confirmed as time went on.

I would be interested to hear your experience.. as we as a cathedral continue to listen for the voice of God in our day, to us individually and corporately..

Susanna

Thanks to Richard Rohr for his inspiring reflections.¹²

¹² <https://cac.org/swallowed-by-a-whale-2018-05-30/>