

There were two phrases that caught my attention this week. The first one was “The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.” The second seems to address the first: “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle.” Let’s figure out what’s going on here.

There is no disputing that speaking and listening go together. Having something to say depends on what you see, hear, and experience. However, if all we do is talk, we don’t give ourselves the opportunity to listen. There needs to be a balance.

But, what if that voice we hear comes not from where we expect it? What if that voice comes from a living God? Our expectations necessarily change.

Samuel’s first assumption was that it was Eli calling him. Made sense. He had been at Eli’s beck and call since his mother Hannah brought him to the temple. Eli’s first assumption was that Samuel was either hearing things, or just didn’t want to go to bed! That made sense as well. Yet after three episodes, it was impossible to ignore that there was more going on here than met the ears.

God was making God’s self accessible again. Eli realizes that that which had not been a part of the temple for a long time was breaking through history once more. And, Samuel, young boy that he was, finally realized that his Lord was not the old man in the other room, but a deity who called him by name.

God found, in a young boy, a pair of willing ears. Perhaps God had been trying to call others in the temple, but it wasn’t until Hannah’s son arrived was there anyone open to hearing God’s call. Not only did Samuel hear God’s call, Samuel listened. God entrusted Samuel with the extraordinary news that would shake Eli’s world and begin a new direction for Israel.

Sounds familiar doesn’t it? Many, many years later, God found, in a young girl, a pair of willing ears. Again, God may have been trying to invite others to bear God’s child, but it wasn’t until Mary’s “yes” that God could once again begin a new direction for Israel – a new direction for the whole world, in fact.

This new direction finds Jesus calling his disciples in the gospel selection for today. Like Eli, Nathaniel is skeptical about what he hears from Philip. Like Samuel, Philip is insistent that Nathaniel “come and see.” In both situations, those being called are known by the one who is calling.

Being called by God invites us to consent to a relationship. This relationship is personal – God knows our name and calls us by it. This relationship is risky. Samuel must tell Eli that his sons’ behavior cost him his credibility and power. Mary risks her reputation and her honor. The disciples all commit to a way of life that they could never have imagined. I have a feeling there was more than just their ears tingling.

These invitations. These calls. They are God asking us to trust, to follow, to risk in order to live an abundant life. They are not phone calls asking us to volunteer for something short-term. They bid us to invest our very being in God’s plan for the world. We are asked to, in the words of today’s collect, ***shine with the radiance of Christ’s glory, that he may be known, worshipped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth.*** We’re to do that “illumined” by Word and Sacrament.

What does that mean?
Are your ears tingling?

It means that we must be serious about becoming followers of Jesus and not simply lovers of liturgy. There’s absolutely nothing wrong with liturgy – it’s what I do! However, there is always a temptation to make ritual itself our focus of worship, instead of it being a tool to build a relationship with God in Christ. It means committing time to study scripture, learning the stories of our faith. It means dedicating our common life to worship and service together. It means sharing the goodness of our community in our neighborhoods.

I believe that the Holy Spirit is calling us to rediscover and reestablish our identity in this part of God’s vineyard. We have the resources for beautiful and meaning liturgy. We have a loving community that should be the envy of every church. We have smart, intellectual people with a passion for justice. We have everything we need to proclaim Christ as Redeemer to the world around us.

Now, we must do it.

A couple of weeks ago, I talked about the name given to this church long before any of us arrived on these doorsteps. I asked you to think about what it means to claim the name Redeemer in the second decade of the 21st century.

I have been thinking about it as well. I've come to an understanding that to live in the name of the Redeemer is to live where I need not be afraid.

In a place and in a time where scary things are only a tweet away, how welcoming and wonderful to know that there is a community that proclaims that we need not be afraid. We know that our Redeemer lives. Whatever fearful thing is happening around us, it is not the end of the story.

Who do you know who needs to hear that message? Who do you know who needs to be told that they are loved unconditionally? Who do you know who wants to work alongside others to build a more just society? They are the ones we are to invite into this community to help us bear the Redeemer's name to Bannockburn, to Bethesda, to the Nation's Capital, to the world.

Are you ready to say "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening?" I hope so. Because I believe Jesus has some amazing things in store for us. Amen.