

**“WE HAVE FOUND HIM!”**  
**I Samuel 3:1-10; John 1:43-51**  
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Have you ever been awakened abruptly in the middle of the night? When the phone rings at our house, waking us out of a deep sleep, it is usually a genuine emergency or a wrong number. Both are unsettling, and wake you up in a hurry. I am a sound sleeper, but when our kids were young, a baby’s cry would have me awake in no time.

Now I must confess, I am not always alert and oriented when I am awakened at night. When we lived in Youngstown, for a while I was the chaplain-on-call for the local Days Inn. In every room, there was a little card that said, “If you would like to talk with a pastor, call Dr. Charles Yoost, pastor of Church Hill United Methodist Church,” and it gave both my church and home phone numbers. Many folks took advantage of this service and called me, some at very inappropriate times. One night the phone rang, waking me out of a deep sleep. My wife had also been awakened by the call. I listened carefully while a woman from the hotel told me her problems. I tried to counsel her as best I could over the phone, then invited her to join us for worship services the next morning. “Charlie,” my wife interrupted, “Tomorrow is Tuesday!” If you call me in the middle of the night, I’ll talk with you, but I can’t guarantee the validity of what I might say!

The young Samuel was serving an internship in the temple under the supervision of Eli, the priest, when he was awakened one night. It wasn’t a telephone call. He heard a voice. Eli must need something, Samuel assumed. This happened three times. Finally, the Bible says, “*Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy.*”(3:8) Eli instructed Samuel that when he heard the voice again, Samuel should respond by saying, “*Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.*”(3:9)

God was indeed calling Samuel. Although only an adolescent at the time, Samuel was being called to be a prophet, one of the greatest prophets that Israel would ever know. Samuel would advise kings and rulers. He would be the moral compass of the kingdom through the reign of numerous kings and queens. He would be a spiritual leader who would set the tone for justice and righteousness for the whole kingdom. And it all started when he was awakened that night in the temple and was counseled by Eli to be open and receptive to what Eli perceived was the call of God upon Samuel’s heart and life.

Now the Lectionary fast-forwards us to the days when Jesus walked the dusty roads of Galilee. Jesus came upon Philip and said, “*Follow me.*” We don’t know a lot of details, but Philip was so excited by Jesus’ invitation that he went and told his friend Nathanael, “*We have found him about whom Moses and the prophets wrote, Jesus from Nazareth.*”(1:45) Now wait a minute! Didn’t we just read that Jesus found Philip? Now Philip says, “We have found Jesus!” Which is it? Actually, both are accurate. Jesus finds Philip, and Philip finds Jesus.

When we first moved to Mansfield, our little dog was quite bewildered. One night she managed to get out of the house and took off down the street. We went around the neighborhood looking for that dog, but to no avail. “She’ll be back in the morning,” we told our boys. But morning came, and the dog didn’t. After searching and searching, we decided to put a classified ad in the local paper on the off chance that someone had found our dog and taken her in. The ad was entitled, “**Dog Lost!**,” and it gave a description of our dog. When the paper came the next day, we looked, and sure enough the ad was there. “**Dog Lost.**” But right underneath our ad was another ad that was entitled, “**Dog Found!**” And it gave almost the exact description of what we had written. Eagerly we called the phone number in the paper. Yes, the folks had a nice, sandy-colored mutt that fit the description of our dog perfectly. Quickly we got in the car and headed for their home. And what a reunion we had!

A few years ago there was a nationwide evangelistic campaign entitled, “I Found it!” There were bumper stickers and billboards and all the rest. The idea was that when people asked, those of us who were part of the campaign would tell them that we had found Jesus, and give our testimony. But the truth is not only that we’ve found it, but that we have been found. **All the while we are looking for God, God is looking for us!** It was St. Augustine who said, “*You have formed us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless, until they find their rest in you.*” I firmly believe that God has created us with a god-shaped hole in our hearts that can be filled by God alone. Nothing less than God can fill that hole, which explains why lovers of earthly things are never satisfied.

My friend, have you found what you are looking for in life? Philip readily responded to Jesus’ call and claim upon his life. For Nathanael, it took a while. We sometimes imply that the decision to follow Jesus was obvious and simple for the first disciples. But they had their doubts and reservations, just as we do. For some, the decision to respond to God’s call seems the natural and logical thing to do. Others come to faith only after a long search and a painful struggle.

God is persistent. God will not leave us alone. I love the poem, “*The Hound of Heaven,*” by Francis Thompson. In it he compares God with the persistence of a faithful dog. When a dog wants to go outside, he or she just keeps pestering you until you finally give in and take the dog for a walk. Thompson says, that’s how God is! Thompson, who had been a hopeless alcoholic was converted and became a new person. He tells about how he resisted God, but that God would not give up on him. “*I fled him down the nights and down the days,*” he wrote, “*I fled him down the arches of the yeras; I fled him in the labyrinthine ways of my own mind, and in the mist of tears hid from him. ...But still he followed, followed after.*”(1) Like a dog who will not let us alone until we take him for a walk, God continues to pursue us, and will not let go of us until we yield ourselves to him.

How do we hear God’s call? How do we recognize God’s voice among all the voices we hear in the world today? Technology is a wonderful thing, and it has aided communication in marvelous ways. But I submit that it may be just as difficult to recognize the voice of God today as it was in the days of Samuel and the days of Philip and Nathanael. Maybe even more so.

When I was a junior in high school, I went to a week-long experience sponsored by the United Methodist Women. On the last night of the camp, we were told that we were not allowed to say one word from the time we took communion until the next morning. Now it is hard for me to be quiet now, but it was almost impossible when I was 16 years old! But thanks to the

heavy supervision of the camp staff, I remained quiet that night. It was that night as I walked along a candle lit path by the lake, that I felt the call of God upon my life to be a pastor.

What if I had not been quiet enough for long enough to hear God speak? What if I had secretly put the earphones of my transistor radio in my ear (yes, we had small, battery-operated radios back then) and listened to music or the baseball game instead of being quiet and listening for what God had to say? Are we listening? Have we made any time in our busy schedules for God?

Notice that while Samuel heard a voice, it was Eli who perceived that it was not just the distraction of the night sounds, but quite possibly the voice of God that Samuel was hearing. It was Philip who introduced Nathanael to Jesus. We have a role in helping each other hear the voice of God. When Nathanael tried to discount the idea that Jesus was the Messiah, since, after all, he was coming from the backwoods town of Nazareth, Philip said simply, "*Come and see.*" It is not our job to convert anyone. God will do the converting. But it is our job to share with others what we have found, that they, too, may experience the love and grace and goodness of God.

The call that comes from God is a call to service. Those whom God calls, God gives work to do. Never is the call without its challenges. Never is God's work easy. For Samuel, God's call was to be a prophet, to say things that were honest but difficult about the direction his country was headed. New leadership was being called for. The integrity of the nation was at stake. The work to which Jesus called the first disciples was not without its difficulties, either. Many of the early followers of Jesus were martyred for their faith. All of them were called to leave familiar surroundings in order to do what God was calling them to do.

We sometimes have the idea that those who are prominent spokespersons for the faith do not struggle with the call and do not have second thoughts about the work that God gives them to do. But that is not the case. No one has influenced the world more and been a finer example of Christian service in our lifetime than has Mother Theresa. Yet in her biography, released on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her death in 2007, the world was stunned to read that Mother Theresa had lived most of her vocation as a Sister of Charity with a profound sense, not of God's presence, but of God's absence in her life. After her initial feeling of "call," her experience was, for all intents and purposes, abandonment by the very one she sought to serve. Yet she continued faithfully through the years.

I remember reading about Martin Luther King, Jr., and his experience of sitting at the kitchen table of his home one night when he could not sleep. Like Samuel, who was afraid to tell Eli what God's message was, Martin Luther King, Jr., was filled with anxiety. Oh, don't get me wrong, he had heard God's call, and he had followed. But now he was in the middle of the civil rights movement. He had put his family at risk. He was weary of the struggle, and he was wrestling with whether he had made the right decision. You know the story. Martin Luther King, Jr., did not waver from his calling.

Amidst all the competing voices of this world, may we recognize the call of God upon our hearts and lives. May we join Samuel and Philip and Nathanael and Mother Theresa and Martin Luther King, Jr., in saying, "*We have found him!*" We have found what we are looking for! All the while we have been searching for God, God has been seeking us, and God has found us! May we recognize his voice and have the courage to follow where God leads. God has work for us to do. May the words of Samuel be on our lips this day, "*Speak, Lord, for your servant is*

*listening.”*

*Prayer:* Lord, amidst all the noise that we hear, help us to hear your voice and your clear call to each of us. Then help us to respond, and to follow where you lead, to go where you call us to go, and to do what you have for us to do. We pray in the name of Jesus, the one we are looking for, the one who has found us! Amen.

Note:

1. Thompson, Francis. “*The Hound of Heaven.*” *Return to Tradition: A Directive Anthology.* pp. 94f.