

Sermon 4b 2018: God Calls Us To the Life That's Really Life

God Speaks

My favorite Christian writer is a Presbyterian minister from San Antonio named Max Lucado

And Max tells the story on himself of a high school summer job

Where he was working in West Texas, helping to lay pipe in an oil field.

He remembers that every day at lunch time, the workers gathered to tell jokes & play cards;

For thirty minutes in the heat of the day, the oil patch became a little Las Vegas;

Replete with coarse language, dirty jokes, blackjack and barstools that doubles as lunch pails

One day during lunch a supervisor walked toward the workers;

And they all wondered if he had a job for them that couldn't wait until lunch was over;

Uh fellows, the supervisor said;

The workers turned and looked up at him, Fellows, I, uh, I just wanted to invite

The workers could tell he was uncomfortable with whatever he was trying to say

I just wanted to tell you, he tried again, our church is having service tonight and;

What! Max thought to himself in disbelief. He's talking church? Out here? With us?

I wanted to invite any of you to come along, the supervisor said.

There was silence among the workers; Several stared at the dirt

Others looked at each other. No one said anything.

Well that's it, the supervisor finished, if any of you want go

Just let me know. After saying that he left.

When the supervisor was a good bit away, Max and the other workers began to laugh.

Five years later Max was a college sophomore struggling with a decision;

Max admits that he had drifted far from his faith;

He wanted to know Jesus again, but the price was too high.

His friends might laugh;

That's when he remembered the supervisor in the oil field;

Remembered that the supervisor's love for God had been greater

Than his concern for his reputation with his fellow workers;

So I came home, Max says.

Throughout the pages of the Bible, we find a God who loves us

And who wants the very best for and from each of us;

Sometimes God speaks to us directly and other times God speaks

Through other people, like the supervisor

In either case we must respond one way or another to the voice of God.

God does speak.

Samuel

Samuel was just a young boy when he went to live in the temple with the old priest, Eli;

Samuel's mother, Hannah, had dedicated her son to God's service at a very young age;

And Samuel had all the energy and enthusiasm of a child;

Eli was old and his eyesight was dim;

The sons who were next in line were not Eli, in fact they were frauds;

The word of the Lord was rare in those days; perhaps no one was listening.

Samuel slept in the sanctuary, right by the Ark of the Covenant

And one night while Eli and his sons were sleeping, God calls to young Samuel;

Samuel, Samuel, and his first thought is that it's Eli calling;

So he bounces up and races to Eli's tent.

Here I am, the boy says, for you called;

Eli was sound asleep and had not called Samuel;

I didn't call is Eli's response and he tells him to go back to sleep.

As Samuel falls asleep once more, he here's the voice calling his name again, Samuel;
Again, he race to Eli's tent, this time sure that Eli has called him;
And again, Eli sends him back to bed.

Then it happened a third time and again he rushes to Eli's side;
We are told Samuel did not know the Lord
And the word of the Lord had not been revealed to him;
Who was calling him? Samuel had no idea.

My cousin Bob was raised in a pretty strict Christian home, but by the time he was sixteen;
Bob had given up on trying to please God and had decided to put religion aside;
Years later, Bob was traveling through Detroit to call on one of the car companies;
And decided to have lunch at the Big Boy Restaurant;
He sat at the counter; no one knew him and strangers sat on either side of him.

As Bob was eating his lunch, he felt a tap on his shoulder;
He turned around to see a scholarly looking man;
Bob didn't know who the man was, but the stranger looked at Bob and said,
I want to see you in church.

Bob was dumbfounded and a little embarrassed as the men sitting next to him turned and stared;
Why me, he thought to himself, he wasn't attending church
And knew that he wasn't really living a Christian life;
At first he thought the man was soliciting for Bob to come to his church
And my cousin told him that he didn't live in Detroit.

I didn't say what church, the man replied, I said I want to see you in church;
Bob swiveled around back to the counter to mull it over;

And when he turned back the man was gone and was nowhere to be seen in the restaurant;
When Bob got home and told his wife,
They decided that if God wanted them in church so much
That he would go to all that trouble, they ought to give it some thought;
A few weeks later they found a church and have been going ever since.

Listening for God

God does speak, but Maybe we Don't Listen;

It took Eli three times before he realized that it was God calling little Samuel;
You would think a priest who had dedicated his life to serving God
Would realize sooner rather than later whose calling Samuel;
And to his credit, Eli finally tells Samuel that if the voice calls again;
Samuel is to respond, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening."

We're never too young or too old, too important or too unimportant for God to call us;
That challenge is that a lot of times we're not listening;
Or we're not listening for God.

A few years ago, I had some decisions to make;

They weren't life changing, earth shattering decisions, but they were important enough
That I was spending time in the middle of the night thinking about them.

I asked several people for their thoughts and suggestions and got a lot of different advice;

I was confused and got a little frustrated by all the information before me
And no clear sense of what to do from all the people advising me.

One morning, as I sat with my one year Bible in an early morning, probably playing catch up

I found these words staring at me from Psalm 46 – "Be still, and know that I am God!"

I realized at that moment that I had asked so many people their opinion about my decision;
And hadn't remembered to listen for God's opinion;
I was trusting in myself and trusting in others, but not in God;
And so I waited on God for God's voice and direction.

I waited and waited, and though I didn't hear a voice telling me how to decide;
Within a week or two, it had all become clear and I had me decision;
And it was a good one and I have never looked back;
But have gotten into the regular, daily habit of being still
And remembering who has my best interests in mind.

God is speaking to each of us and all of us as a community, all the time;
Perhaps we miss it with all the other noise in our lives;
Perhaps we're too busy being in control that we blow right by God's plan;
Some of us aren't really listening all that much;
But when we do, God will speak the words of knowledge and love
That are just right, in fact, perfect for our lives.

Here I Am

Here I am is the ready response to God's call;
After waking Eli up for the third time, Samuel goes back to bed;
Samuel would be called one more time that night and this time when God calls;
Samuel pops up saying exactly what Eli instructed him to say
Speak for your servant is listening and God spoke to Samuel;
It was the beginning of a very intimate and powerful relationship
That lasted for many fruitful decades.

And that speaks to a third reason we might be reluctant to hear God's call – change;
Many of us are concerned about the changes God might require of us.

We probably each know what those changes are, if we're honest with ourselves;

But the one promise I can offer you is that the God who had the first word in creating you

Will also have the last word and that word is LIFE, real life, full life

Adventuresome life, gracious life.

The God who came down from His glory in heaven to live among us;

To teach us, heal us, forgive us, take away our sins on a cross

And break the hold and power of death forever is the same God

Who is calling you and me to a life for greater, for more loving,

Far more gracious and interesting than any life

We're going to find on our own.

God speaks to us in so many different ways and you and I need to spend more time listening;

We need to be still, we need to pay attention and when we hear God's voice;

We need to respond and be prepared to become, by the grace of God,

New people.

So the next time you hear someone calling you in the night;

Or in some unexpected place;

Or in the midst of some major life decision, listen up and respond as Samuel did;

Speak Lord, for your servant is listening;

Once we have been called by the love of God

Our lives will never be the same.

Amen.