

Message from Pastor John

June 14, 2020

“The Call”

1 Samuel

3 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

2 At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; 3 the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. 4 Then the LORD called, “Samuel! Samuel!”[a] and he said, “Here I am!” 5 and ran to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” So he went and lay down. 6 The LORD called again, “Samuel!” Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” 7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. 8 The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. 9 Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

10 Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

Many years ago, while serving a small country church with only 40 members, one of my elders came to speak with me. He reminded me that he had previously worshipped at a very grand Lutheran church, and was bemoaning how plain and simple Presbyterian sanctuaries and worship were.

He confessed to missing his “smells & bells”, colorful robes, enormous choir and massive stained-glass windows. Then he said he understood why we ordained pastors but not why Presbyterians ordain elders and deacons. “Surely they are just ordinary members asked to do a job that needs done. They don’t need to be ordained, do they?”

A few weeks later he told me that he now understood our tradition better as he had been reading a book on the History and Basic Tenets of Reformed Theology." Here "he said" have a copy and I highlighted a few passages which makes worship here more satisfying and explain why you ordained me as an elder."

The main passage he had marked stated "In Reformed Theology, the preaching of God's word is the central focus." So far so good, I thought.

But the next sentence floored me "We believe that the words of the preacher, well prepared and skillfully delivered, ARE the living Word of God and have the same inspiration, authority and importance as Scripture."

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That point of view was not one I had previously heard, and I spent the rest of the afternoon in panic, prayer and exploring the possibility of an immediate career change!

My sermon was "God's word" and the same as scripture????

I can assure you it put me right off ever getting into a pulpit again.

Somewhat lost I then looked through the rest of the book. The other section he had marked was headed "Ordination and God's Call". That explained that "Ordination was a recognition that the whole church, and every member of it, had a ministry to perform. It was not about the individual.

We ordain people to different functions, though none is more important than another.

Deacons are to care for the people, exercising a ministry of compassion. Elders to assure the governance of the church, reflecting Reformed theology and polity. A few are ordained to a ministry of Word & Sacrament."

Well at least that didn't say my sermons were infallible utterings.

Of course, I knew all that and, in my training, it was emphasized that Presbyterians have no hierarchy, no one is the boss of another, we all have work to do together and we simply focus on different parts.

I also remembered that when I was first moved to consider being a pastor I was told to look out for certain “signs” which would test the authenticity of my Call.

- 1) It would not go away. --Three times God called Samuel.
- 2) I had a certain understandable resistance to being called, convinced that I was not good enough. ---Samuel did not know the voice of the Lord and kept thinking it was Eli who called him.
- 3) Other people recognize that you are called and encourage you.--- Eli with his experience and skill was the one who realized what was going on and told Samuel to listen and respond.
- 4) You finally understand and obey. On the fourth call Samuel said “Here I am Lord.”

Today as we do every year, we are going to ordain some of our members to be elders and deacons. Some I am sure resisted, some had to be asked more than once. But each, whether they realized it or not, saw the hand of God beckoning them to serve and we are all going to recognize God’s call to each one and we will encourage them.

Reading the Call passages, highlighted by my elder, made me feel better. It did not completely remove the terror of being ‘God’s living word spokesperson’. Anyway I did not know the author of that book and have never found that opinion again.

It did remind me that all of us are just conduits for God’s spirit. There is another tenet of reformed theology worth repeating:

“God does not call the well-equipped. God well equips those called.”

It is not about me; I am just a tool in God’s hands doing some work God wants done. It is to remind myself of that, that I wear my clerical collar and robes when I minister.

It is not about you as an individual, but it is a Call from God for every single one of us. We are called to minister in our homes, in our communities, in our jobs, in our daily lives.