

May 3, 2020 "Called by Name" Psalm 23, John 10:1-10

<sup>3</sup>The guard at the gate opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup>Whenever he has gathered all of his sheep, he goes before them and they follow him because they know his voice.

If you pause and think about it, it almost takes your breath away. God knows your name. God calls you by name. My sheep know my voice when I call them, and they will follow. It is almost incomprehensible. God calls each of us by name, and we are to follow.

It sounds simple enough, but it hard to put into action. When did God call your name? How did God call your name? "When God Speaks" the question, do we listen?

My sheep know my voice, I GO BEFORE THEM, I know them, call them, lead them, THEY FOLLOW BECAUSE THEY KNOW MY VOICE.

Now I might not know what you are thinking, but I understand. I understand because God calls us by name, but we don't always willingly say yes. In truth, my journey of saying yes rather than no to God was a long one.

Upon hearing God's voice, my call was more of shock resulting in me wrestling with God for over 20 years. Called at thirteen of all places at Methodist revival, accepted salvation on a dare, I haven't expected the call into ministry. Hearing that small still voice, I ran for my life like Jonah.

When I use the term "calling," I mean to describe one's sense of purpose, knowing that this is the right thing to do and the right time to do it, one's passion of being selected by God to do a specific ministry. Everyone has a calling—sometimes dramatic and singular, but often more subtle and short-term.

I think of Isaiah's sense of God's calling: "The LORD called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb, he named me." God said, "You are my servant, in

whom I will be glorified.” Isaiah wonders if he heard God right. But God says, yes, “it’s you I’m talking to.” From time to time Isaiah wonders and checks in with God, each time hearing another version of, “You are my servant, . . . in whom I will be glorified.”

If you think about that for a minute, those are amazing words because they mean that God needed Isaiah to get things done. God needed saints and martyrs, artists and activists, Martin Luther, and Martin Luther King, Jr. to get things done. God needs us, to unfold and reveal the kingdom of God in our world.

Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we experience healing of sins, the resurrection to eternal life in God's love. As we start our journey to find our calling, it begins with a relationship with the Lord is my Shepherd. We are his sheep transforming into his disciples.

Of course, sorting out one's calling is difficult. It's more than simply opening your heart to Jesus and “poof,” an entire game plan is presented. It’s much more subtle than that.

Finding our call, hearing that small still voice, harken us to follow, is a journey. Whether you should be a fireman or a secretary, a nurse or a schoolteacher—whether you should buy a house, or take a new job? I don't know the specific answer to those or any other questions. But I do know how to find the answer to following Jesus as his disciple, discovering your gifts to build up the body of Christ.

It lies in the art of listening. The disciples had to learn to listen before doing. They spend time with Jesus, absorbing his words, taking in his vision for the world, hearing God's word through Jesus, hearing the promises of scripture, and watching them be revealed and fulfilled in everyday living.

Frederick Buechner talks about the two sides of finding one's calling— recognizing the caller, and recognizing ourselves amid that calling. He explains that to be called is to have a vocation. A vocation is a place where someone practices one’s calling.

Buechner points out that there are always different voices calling us to different kinds of work. He says the trick is sorting out which voice is from God, which from society, which is from a voice of super-ego or self-interest. He says the trick for the Christian is to find 1) the work that one most needs to do, and 2) the work that most needs to be done. In other words, Buechner says, vocation is that place where "your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

Pondering this week and thinking about the art of being, I begin to wonder how we find our voice to hear God's voice.

Stephen R. Covey summarizes what I am trying to say: "One word expresses the pathway to greatness: voice. Those on this path find their voice and inspire others to find theirs." [www.stephencovey.com](http://www.stephencovey.com) (The 8<sup>th</sup> Habit of Effective People)

As I reflect on John's words, that to hear God's voice, we also need to know and use our voice as well. Listening to yourself is learning to know God. While no easy matter, it should not keep you from taking this journey.

How do you rediscover your voice? This is the art of being with endless possibilities.

There are many ways to discover your voice. My first impression is to ask the right questions. It is the same process of discovering your spiritual gifts. Our gifts are an extension of your voice: heart, mind, soul, and spirit.

1. What do you love doing?
2. What are you good at doing?
3. What gives your life meaning and purpose?
4. Where can you serve?

Asking these simple questions helps you begin to listen to your voice given to you by God. It is a unique voice. The more you began to listen to that inner voice, the more you will begin to hear God's voice. Trusting, following, and hearing your voice is a lifelong journey. But once you start, you'll realize that God speaks in you, through you, and to others by using you. You will be more willing to follow Him. You will begin to

discover where and how to serve. Perhaps without realizing it, this pandemic has given us the great gift of silence. It is in the silence you will find your voice, God's voice.

I know some of you are in touch with your calling, with what God has called you into, or perhaps pushed you. Others of you, I know, wrestle with this. It will come. It may not be a dramatic way. It may unfold slowly and simply, but it will come. If you pray, if you remain open. You ask someone else to pray with you or look with you. May we be brought to that place where we find Christ as he reveals himself to us, and in so doing, find ourselves because Jesus Goes BEFORE you, He knows, leads, and He calls you by name. And you follow because you hear his voice.

The meeting of our deep gladness and the world's deep hunger happens in prayer, in worship, fellowship, and community; in struggle, in grief, in joy, in our life transition. . . even amid the sacraments. We live into our vocations together resulting in a common vision. This church's vision is "Come as You Are." How does worship, community meals, building projects, a desire to reach out speak to younger generations speak to this church's voice, passion, and vision? I encourage you to explore these thoughts with your new incoming pastor as you journey together.

May you listen, may you find that voice as you celebrate the Great Thanksgiving today, and pray for your next pastor and their transition. In the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. (Communion and then pastoral announcement)

Dear friends, I want to share with you that I will be retiring effective July 1, 2021. I am grateful for the ministry that I have shared with you, I look forward to new opportunities for Cindy and me and you as we serve in the name of Jesus Christ. I ask that you keep Cindy and me and your new pastor and family in your prayers.