



A SERMON

by Rev. Joann H. Lee: October 12, 2025



WHILE THE REVISED COMMON LECTIONARY IS A THREE-YEAR CYCLE, often focused on the Gospels with a mix of Old Testament texts; the Narrative Lectionary provides a four-year cycle, featuring mostly narrative passages from both Testaments *in* their biblical order.

This allows us to better connect biblical events and themes over time, and helps foster a deeper understanding of the overarching biblical story, from creation to revelation.

There is a big jump today, from where we were last week, in the wilderness, after the Exodus from Egypt, to

where we are this week, which is settled in the promised land of milk and honey, during the time of the judges' rule, after conquering the Canaanites.

Tomorrow, we honor Indigenous People's Day, formerly known as Columbus Day, so it seems appropriate that, even in our scripture lesson, we are on borrowed or, more accurately, stolen land.

As we gather this morning, we offer a land acknowledgement: We acknowledge that Calvary is located on the unceded, ancestral homeland of the Raymutush Ohlone peoples who are the indigenous inhabitants of the San Francisco Peninsula.

We recognize that this community of faith has and continues to benefit from the use and occupation of this land and confess that we still have much learning to do on the history of this land and its relationship to its native peoples.

We also recognize that land acknowledgment alone is not enough.

And we hope to do more to celebrate and honor the amazing people who first occupied this territory and to work together for reparative justice.

1 Samuel 3:1-21

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.

At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; 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.

Then the Lord called, 'Samuel! Samuel!'

and he said, 'Here I am!' and ran to Eli,

and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.'

But Eli said, 'I did not call; lie down again.'

So he went and lay down.

The Lord called again, 'Samuel!'

Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.'

But Eli said, 'I did not call, my son; lie down again.'

Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord,

and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.

The Lord called Samuel again, a third time.

And Samuel 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.

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.

Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, 'Samuel! Samuel!'

And Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.'

Then the Lord said to Samuel, 'See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle.

On that day I will fulfill against Eli

all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end.

For I have told him that I am about to punish his house for ever,

for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them.

Therefore, I swear to the house of Eli

that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering for ever.'

Samuel lay there until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord.

Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli.
But Eli called Samuel and said, 'Samuel, my son.'
He said, 'Here I am.'
Eli said, 'What was it that God told you? Do not hide it from me.
May God do so to you and more also,
if you hide anything from me of all that he told you.'
So Samuel told Eli everything and hid nothing from him.
Then he said, 'It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him.'
As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him
and let none of God's words fall to the ground.
And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew
that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord.
The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh,
for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord.

THE PROPHET SAMUEL IS THE ONE WHO TRANSITIONS THE HEBREW PEOPLE from a more dispersed rule by the judges to a more centralized rule by a monarchy. Samuel will go on to anoint Israel's very *first* king, King Saul. And then to anoint Israel's most *famous* king, King David.

To lead a people through a time of political unrest and transition is no small task. But Samuel is up to that task. Today's story, however, takes place before all this happens. Samuel is just a young boy, learning from his mentor, Eli, in the temple when he is called by God.

Call stories in scripture are fascinating to me. They give us insight into the heroes and ancestors of our faith. They give us insight into God and how God chooses to work in the world.

Two weeks ago, Victor preached on Exodus and the call of Moses. In that story, God shows up as a burning bush, calling Moses by name, and Moses, at first, says, "No, thank you. You've probably got the wrong guy."

Samuel's call story is different. And so we learn that there is no *one* way that God calls us, and there is no *one* way people respond. The undeniable truth found in all these stories, however, is that God does, indeed, call us.

Now, it would be a stretch to say that God *needs* us. God delights in us. God created us. God loves us. But God doesn't *need* us. If God can create the world by speaking, God doesn't *need* us to do God's work, right? And yet, God still *chooses* to be in relationship with us. God still chooses to use broken and imperfect beings like us to do God's work in this world.

Once upon a time, God called me to this odd and wondrous calling, as a pastor. I resonate with Samuel because he didn't recognize that it was *God* calling him at first. He thinks it's Eli. And it isn't until Eli tells him that it's probably God that Samuel is able to hear what God has to say.

My own call into ministry was like that. I didn't go to seminary because I heard the voice of God calling me in the middle of the night and immediately understood what I was to do. I went to seminary because I wanted to quit law school, and starting another graduate program felt better than just dropping out. And I went to seminary because my mentor, Pastor Shawn, saw a call on my life that I did not yet recognize. He was my Eli, understanding God's call on my life before I even could.

My call to ministry was much more *external*, *other* people helping me understand God's voice, rather than hearing it for myself. Eventually, that call that others saw in me was internalized, and I heard it, too. But it took a long while, and a lot of other people, helping affirm, that yes, this was God calling!

Friends, God calls each and every one of you, too, maybe not to be a pastor, but to be fully *you* and to do what only you can do in this world.

You are called. And here's the thing. God does call us. But there are so many reasons why we don't respond, so many reasons why we might not hear and why we might not answer.

Sometimes, we *mistake* the calling—because how could it possibly be God? Like Samuel, we live in *those* days when the word of the Lord is rare, and visions are not widespread. So we think, it can't be God. And we explain it away.

Other times, we simply don't even *hear* God's call. Maybe, we're fast asleep and not woke enough. Sleep is comfortable; sleep is safe. So why wake up and face a scary world with strange voices calling our name in the middle of the night?

Or, we don't hear, because even though we're awake, every waking moment is filled with noise. We live in a restless, noisy world. We live in a world where we can be constantly connected to the news, to the lives of the rich and famous, to whatever video or argument we want to hear, whatever song or program we want to watch.

Our lives are bombarded with constant chatter, more information and more noise than ever before in the history of the humanity! So if we do not hear God, it may be because that still, small voice, cannot be heard over the loud drums of war, the constant screeching of pundits and politicians, or the broken cries of the oppressed. We do not hear God's voice, though God is calling us.

And, then there are the times when we hear God's voice or experience God's call but ignore it.

How often do we think, "Okay—that's probably God," but choose to walk away, don't make eye contact, am I right?

There's actually Hebrew midrash about Moses's call story that says, that the burning bush had been aflame for a long time, long before Moses even got there. And it was there, available for so many others to experience God's call. But it was Moses who chose *not* to ignore it, and instead to stop and wonder. As such, it was Moses who was called.

How many times has the presence of God, the call of God, been made known to us, only to have us ignore it altogether? What burning bushes have we walked right past because, well, the sheep need tending, and who really has time to see what that's about? Sometimes, we ignore God's call.

And then, there are times, when it's not an accident that we miss God's call. Instead, we deliberately choose to turn the other way.

There's biblical precedence for that response, too. Remember Jonah? Jonah got swallowed up by a whale because he didn't wanna listen to God! Instead of going to Ninevah where God called him; he boarded a ship going the opposite way. In the end, the whale spit him out in Nineveh any way.

Friends, be assured, God is calling you. But we don't always hear, and we don't always listen.

Let us give thanks, then, that God also does not give up. God called for Samuel *four* different times in one night! God doesn't give up on us; God doesn't say, "Oh well, I tried." No. God is persistent and calls us again and again.

And God places people and a community in our lives, so that we can better hear God's call for us. That's one of the reasons why the church is so important. We help each other discern one another's gifts and the call God puts on our lives. And sometimes the church helps us discern what is *not* for us, too.

As a Presbyterian-flavored Christian, I couldn't say, on my own, "Hmm... I feel like being a pastor today," and then ordain myself and start a church all on my own. There may be some traditions where you could do that, but it's rare. Instead, there is a whole call process that involves a local congregation, the presbytery, and then another church willing to ordain you into a shared ministry.

And sure, the process can be misused and misguided; it has been, in fact. But the intention is that we hear God's call best in and through community.

So, how will you listen for God's call in your life this week? Will you wake up to notice what's happening in the world? Will you turn down the noise and the distractions that keep God's call at bay? Will you pay attention and stop to notice, wonder, and listen?

Frederick Buechner says that, "The place God calls you to is the place where your deepest gladness and the world's deepest hunger meet".

And you can be called by God, without becoming a minister or leaving your current job; although that's not out of the realm of possibility, it's also not necessary. God calls us to all types of work and to all types of ministry. You may be called to be a reporter *and* the coordinator of pack-a-sack. You may be called to be a lawyer *and* a youth leader. You may be called to be an inflatable frog, protesting at an ICE building in Portland. Like I said, God calls us to all types of work and to all types of ministry.

The mission and ministry fair two weeks ago was one way we hoped you'd hear and answer God's call. There will be more opportunities to learn about and sign up to serve. Perhaps, the announcements in your bulletin might be another way. Perhaps today's adult education presentation from Raphael House will call to you in surprising ways.

In a few moments, we have a special minute for ministry from Joel Burrill, who heads the Churchwide Nominating Committee. Perhaps, God is calling *you* to be an elder, a deacon, or a trustee. Now, remember, we don't get to just say, "God told me I should be an elder!" and then you just become one.

We are called in community and for community and through community. So sometimes the community discerns maybe that's just not the right fit for you or the right time for the church.

But let us be people who listen, who hear, who discern, and who say, "Speak, Lord! For your servant is listening."
And then to respond, "Here I am."

Today, we have the great joy of welcoming new members. These members have answered God's call to join a local church community, in which to participate, give back, and grow in faith and relationships. And we're lucky that they found Calvary. Their statements of faith on Tuesday were so moving.

Thank you, new members, for hearing God's call and saying, "Here I am." Thank you for answering God's call to community.

Friends, God is calling you, all of you. And the world needs you. Because the world is hurting. And it needs us to show up and do our part for its repair. So do not turn away.

Amen.