

The Second Sunday after Epiphany

January 14, 2018

Cycle B

1 Samuel 3:1-10

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

John 1:43-51

Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord, Jesus Christ.

I remember sweeping the parts department and the lumberyard when I was about twelve. In the pecking order of the blue collar place my grandfather's business was, sweeping was pretty much at the bottom. It was a job young boys got to do at the end of the day. They'd never ask the men who worked in the shop, or my cousins who had skilled roles in the business. Throw out the sweeping compound, sweep it back up, put it in the trash.

That was the first year I recall working at the lumberyard. All my male cousins employed themselves usefully there – repairing tractors, cotton pickers and combines; assisting a mechanic; or *go-fer-ing*. So even though I wasn't getting paid – and they were – what else was there for me to do. I'd assist my younger cousin Terry while he assembled some farm implement or other, because to quote my cousins who lived in my mom's hometown, I was a "*city slicker*" who didn't know "*jack*." If they'd have pointed him out, I would have introduced myself. I didn't know exactly what "*city slicker*" meant, but I could tell by the sneer that went with it that it wasn't good. In all honesty, they were right. Mostly I just tried to stay out of everybody's way – invisible and useless as I was there.

So I swept, it was, it seems, the only thing I was really good for. Usually, my eight year old cousin, Patrick, got this honor, but he'd been promoted because there was someone even less useful than him – me. My Uncle Joe promoted eight year old Patrick to "*usefulness*" when he told him to show me how to sweep up. I was eager to be seen and to help.

In ancient Israel being twelve was just the same. Until you turned

the magical age of thirteen as a boy, and were bar mitzvah into manhood you were an insignificant part of the community. You weren't a kid anymore, but you had to stay with the women. You just didn't count. Just so, Samuel swept the temple every day.

In light of the fact that twelve year olds were historically ignored and overlooked, *it's astounding that in the text for this morning from 1st Samuel, God remembers the name of a twelve year old, and speaks to him.* *The LORD* doesn't remark about the size of Samuel's feet, and *doesn't regard him as useless, but rather calls him to be a prophet.* Samuel will be the first prophet in Israel. His job is to bring the word of God into a world which continually ignores and overlooks God's word.

How fitting it is that God who historically has been ignored and overlooked allies himself with one whom the world has ignored and overlooked. Isn't it interesting that God – who few choose to notice and to whom no one seems listens – chooses another – who few choose to notice and to whom no one listens – as a spokesperson.

Samuel was twelve, and served in the temple. You might recall that his mother Hannah who had been unable to have children, gives him to serve the LORD in the temple for having removed her barrenness. Samuel has been working in the temple all day as the old priest Eli's servant. After his final duty – sweeping up the temple – he lays down to sleep for the night. In the night the boy hears his name being called, "*Samuel, Samuel.*" Thinking that his master Eli calls him, he goes to him and says, "*Here I am!*"

But Eli says, "*I did not call you; lie down again.*" Going back to sleep at the foot of the altar, he hears his name again, "*Samuel, Samuel*", but going to Eli discovers yet again that Eli has not called. A third time his name is called

in the night, "*Samuel, Samuel,*" and again he goes to Eli.

This time Eli perceives that it is the Lord calling, and he tells the boy to go back to bed, and to answer the next time by saying, "*Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.*" Finally, God delivers the message to Samuel who attentively listens for God's word.

God's call to Samuel ***comes at a time when the people of Israel had "stopped listening to God."*** They "ignore and overlook the one who claims them as chosen people and led them out of bondage in Egypt." They "forget the One who has delivered them from the hands of many oppressors in the time of the judges. ***It was a time in Israel's life filled with nights and days of darkness. A time when all of the security and meaning in the lives of the people were uncertain.*** The "old religious order no longer delivered God's word or spoke meaningfully to the lives of the people.

The scoundrel sons of Eli, the priests of the day, use their position to serve themselves. And the people no longer listened. ***In the midst of this darkness, God calls Samuel, a twelve year old, to bring forth a change.***

(PAUSE)

Things really haven't changed much? Have they? People have "*stopped listening to God.*" They seem content to "*ignore and overlook the one who claims them as beloved children.*" We have "forgotten the one who has delivered us, and blesses us with the fine land we possess. It is a time filled with nights and days of darkness. A time when all of the security and meaning in the lives of the people are uncertain. Yet no one seems to have any answers.

The "old religious order" no longer deliver's God's Word in purity or

speaking meaningfully to the lives of the people. Church leaders can't come to any agreement on what to do.

Violence and hatred prevail in the world, both here and abroad. The darkness of our sinful human condition is personified in the greed, arrogance, and disdain for public service of all the leaders and nations who strive to control and dominate others. *Meanwhile, word of God goes unheard, no one is listening.*

But something has changed in our lives. God sent his Son, the Word made flesh. In the word, Jesus Christ, God comes into the darkness of our lives. On the cross Jesus turns the world of power and authority inside out and upside down. He left behind the old way of control and domination, and shows us the way of obedience, sacrifice and service. In Christ Jesus – His life, life words, his mercy, his death – God shows us that one life does make a difference in everything. His life, your life, my life.

God does not look to the powerful – presidents, kings, or world leaders – to bring his Word. Nor does God look to the religious establishment alone to bring news of the Kingdom of God. *If we have learned anything recently, it's that those in positions of authority cannot and will not lead us by example or even words to justice, peace, and mercy towards others.* God has looked past what is mighty and wise by this world's standards, and calls on the Samuels of the world – those without great power or influence, those whom the world ignores and overlooks – to bring the good news of change.

Perhaps you think the world does not think much of you, that you are invisible, useless, a lost cause. Perhaps you're someone the world sees as a sweeper and nothing more. God sees something more, and God has

more in mind for your life. God intends for you to be a messenger of the Kingdom in word and deed, making the Lord's goodness, salvation, mercy and forgiveness known to the world.

It is the twelve year olds of the world, the children, the peacemakers, the meek, those that see a new vision, that are entrusted with the powerful Word of God. God entrusts it to us. ***God calls us in baptism to be a new people, a people for whom the same old same old is dead.*** He calls us by name, leads us into a new way and a new life in Him – a life of peace, mercy, caring, and forgiveness. We are called to speak God's word in the world – one word at a time, a minute at a time, one person at a time.

"Speak Lord for your servant is listening!"

AMEN!!!!