

January 18, 2015

1 Samuel 3:1-20; John 1:43-51

*Who Are We Waiting For*

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**1 Samuel 3:1-20** 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 he 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 he 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 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. 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. <sup>10</sup>Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." (NRSV)

**John 1:43-51** <sup>43</sup>The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. <sup>45</sup>Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." (NRSV)

Today, as you know, is known as Martin Luther King Sunday. I am honored to be offering today's sermon as we gather to worship God and to remember God's servant, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. History seems to have softened the radical nature of Dr. King's work of negotiating, demonstrating, and resisting.<sup>1</sup> History has also isolated Dr. King from the scores of people who joined forces with him, and those who worked independently yet in tandem with King's vision of a blessed community. As we honor his life and legacy, let us never forget the struggle, dedication, sacrifices, and bloodshed of so many. And may we never give up or let go of his dream.

Clearly, I am Caucasian. I share my truth with you this morning from my life and experiences as a wife and mother in what is known as an interracial family. I personally do not believe there is a white race and a black race. I believe there is only one race; the human race. However, I realize that is not how most of the world thinks or works. As it is with all of you, my personal experiences and relationships shape my living in the world and my perceptions of people and events including the late Dr. King, his ministry, activism and civil disobedience, the Civil Rights Movement, my faith and the teachings and life of Jesus, and what it is to be a disciple of Christ. It is because of this that I share a part of myself and my family with you today.

In perhaps his most famous sermon Dr. King shared his dream: "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be

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<sup>1</sup> From "Selma"

judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” Little did I know how much Dr. King and I had in common until my three children became adults and in 2013 began to share slivers of their life experiences as non-white people growing up in Vermont. Until then I had been oblivious to the fact that they, just as generations before and people of color alive today, are judged by the color of their skin all the time.

Our daughter is currently an activist and organizer in Chicago. Through her sharing of her work and my following of her work via social media my eyes, ears, and heart have been opened to appreciate the magnitude of the work that is being done to change systems which are so destructive yet so embedded in our culture in the ways we perceive, interact, and live with one another. And it has also opened my eyes, ears, and heart as to how much work still needs to be done.

It makes me cry. Both out of grief for the lack of progress we have made to love one another as Jesus loved over 2,000 years ago, and with tears of pride and hope... pride as a mom, for sure, but also as a citizen of this country and a citizen of the world. The passion, dedication, and work of the unknown, unnamed, unseen people so committed to changing what is wrong is inspirational and hopeful.

As I reflected upon the work of Dr. King, I was reminded of a quote I once read which has been credited to Marian Wright Edelman. “A lot of people are waiting for Martin Luther King or Mahatma Gandhi to come back - but they are gone. We

are it. It is up to us. It is up to you.” She is so right, yet it still seems like some of us are waiting for someone to come along and do our work for us, and so I ask....

“Who are we waiting for to stop the violence against people of color, to hold accountable those who have sworn to protect and serve and instead use excessive force with guns and tasers; leaving their victims dying in the streets, in the alleys, and on the playgrounds of this country?

Who are we waiting for to change the systems that exonerate and even support the greed of individuals and financial institutions that devastate our economy, forcing people all over the country, all over the world, to lose their homes, their jobs, their financial security?

Who are we waiting for to do the imperative work of slowing, stopping and reversing the effects of climate change?

Who are we waiting for to protect the rights of voters in states where these rights are being stripped away, such as in Texas, Florida, and North Carolina; rights Dr. King and many others worked tirelessly and lost their lives for?

Who are we waiting for to bring economic justice and fairness to all, to have livable wages for all jobs, equal pay for equal work, protection of worker’s rights, access to education and healthcare for all?

Who are we waiting for to demand and make true that as a nation we live out the idea that war, if ever waged, is always the last resort and never the first reaction, and that torture is never, ever justifiable or acceptable?

Fannie Lou Hamer, Clyde Kennard, Joanne Robinson, Ella Baker, Annie Lee Cooper, Viola Liuzzo, Audre Lorde

Many of these names, if not all, may be completely unknown by some or all of you. They were to me until recently. This is a very incomplete list of people who didn't wait for someone else. This sampling of lesser known activists and organizers during the 1950's and 60's worked diligently to create the change they wanted to see. The success of the civil rights movement credited to Dr. King was possible only because so many others were actively engaged and involved. Some, like Dr. King, gave the ultimate sacrifice of their lives for the just cause of equality for all of God's children.

Monica James, Debbie Southorn, Asha Rosa, Breanna Champion, Rev. William Barber, Lisa Epstein, Kaleb Autman, Jakya Hobbs

Another much abbreviated list of organizers and activists of today who are not waiting for someone else. I know from my daughter that many (if not all) have risked and continue to risk their own safety to do what is right and just and necessary to bring about a peaceable kingdom on earth. And yes, I have not included local organizers and activists as I hope to learn who they are, who you are as I engage with you in our work together in this church and community.

When I first started preparing for today, I struggled with how today's lectionary texts from the Hebrew Scriptures 1 Samuel 3:1-10 and from the Gospel of John lent themselves to a sermon that I knew would, in some way, incorporate Dr. King and

his work. Yet, the more I read the texts, read commentaries, and was in conversation with colleagues, very important lessons came out of that work which I believe speak to each of us here who are worshiping together as Christians, and perhaps also for the people here as they seek to experience Christian community in worship.

Our reading from 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel tells the story of a boy being called by God to serve, and Samuel becomes a prophet – speaking God’s truth. As I shared with the young people, we all have gifts that God wants us to use to serve the world. No one is too young, or too old; too rich, or too poor; too black or too white.

The Gospel reading from John is interesting to me because it is Jesus’ calling of the disciples with a twist. In today’s text, only Philip is approached by Jesus. In verse 42 – one verse before today’s reading - Simon, renamed Peter by Jesus, is introduced to Jesus by John the Baptist. In today’s text Nathaniel approaches Jesus, not the other way around. This implies to me the Gospel writer’s understanding that to be with Jesus, to follow him requires us, in some way, to do the work, to make the effort of reaching out in faith.

Another great connection for me is the very act of Jesus’ calling of the disciples. It is something that is relayed in all four Gospel accounts, albeit with varying stories. The value of his calling the disciples is how it underscores the need to work in community. And that even Jesus, Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, did not work alone. He relied on people who really had no clue of who he was or what he was about. They were amateur servants who had a love and respect for Jesus and a

passion to change the political and religious systems that were corrupt and oppressed and shamed the people. I now find it particularly striking that it wasn't until Jesus was no longer among the disciples in the physical world that they got it. It was when they did not have a designated leader among them that they really began their difficult, dangerous, sacrificial work that literally changed the world. So who are we waiting for? As people of faith, can we trust that we are able and worthy to serve? As Christians will our faith be enough to trust that God and Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit are with us and within us always?

It is time to stop waiting for someone to lead. Not because we don't need leaders, but because we already have leaders needing us to join them. We may not recognize them as leaders because they may be 8 years old or 12 years old, or black, or brown, or female, or poor. They may be the victims of the systems that are so oppressive and discriminatory. They may be your neighbor or your co-worker. They may be your child or your grandchild.

We must stop using the excuse that there is no one to lead us so as to protect our comfortable, safe lives.

In his sermon "Drum Major Instinct" Dr. King shared (Quote) "Jesus gave us a new norm of greatness. If you want to be important—wonderful. If you want to be recognized—wonderful. If you want to be great—wonderful. But recognize that he

who is greatest among you shall be your servant. That's a new definition of greatness. And this morning, the thing that I like about it: by giving that definition of greatness, it means that everybody can be great, because everybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity to serve. You don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love. And you can be that servant.”<sup>2</sup>

It is time to recognize our own greatness. It is time to recognize the greatness of all people. It is time to live with hearts full of grace, and souls generated by love. It is time to be that servant. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> King Jr, Martin Luther, “Drum Major Instinct,” [http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documententry/doc\\_the\\_drum\\_major\\_instinct/](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documententry/doc_the_drum_major_instinct/) (accessed 1/17/15)