

Epiphany 2B

1 Samuel 3:1-20

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Reading through today's passage from 1 Samuel got me thinking about all the different people in the Bible who have said, "Here I am," or some variation of it to God's call. There is Abraham, first called by God as Abram at seventy-five years of age. He was well into his nineties when God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac, yet, he still said to God, "Here I am." He says the same thing when the Angel of the Lord tells him to stop, and Abraham sees a ram caught in a thicket to offer instead.

God calls to Jacob, the thief who stole his brother's birthright. Through dreams and visions, God calls to Jacob, and he replies, "Here I am." We have Moses, struggling to figure out who he is and where he belongs, who thinks himself unworthy of any task given to him by God, yet at the burning bush, he says to God, "Here I am." When God needed someone to bear his light to the people of Israel, Isaiah answered, "Here I am." And when Saul loses his sight on the Damascus Road, God calls to Ananias, who didn't want to be anywhere near Saul and given the choice, wouldn't touch Saul with a ten-foot pole. Yet, he responds to God's call by saying, "Here I am," and then lays hands upon Saul to restore his vision.

The response to God's call to action comes in other ways in the Bible as well. Noah endures the taunts of neighbors as he builds a giant ark because God told him to do so. There are the wise men (as the Bible calls them) from the East who didn't know the God of Israel, yet they journeyed hundreds of miles to kneel with joy in front of Christ when he was but a child. And Mary, a teenager living in the backwater town of Nazareth, who responds to God's call, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

When you look closely at these Bible stories, you will realize that God often calls the least likely candidates to do his work. Even Samuel falls on that list as he wasn't even a follower of the faith at the time God called to him when he was but a young boy. I find a measure of comfort and hope in these stories. Being a disciple of Jesus doesn't require us to be perfect, for we are perfected through Christ. But we must be open to hearing how God is calling us to bear the light of Christ to the world as we walk the way of love. These are epiphany moments. Times when something inside of us 'clicks' as we realize that God is calling us to action.

God calls to us in many ways. Sometimes he calls us with a voice as he did with Samuel. We must be wise like Eli in discerning that the voice we hear is God's and not our own or the siren song of worldly things. But more often than not, God's call to us is much more subtle requiring us to keep our eyes, ears, and even our hearts open to sensing God's presence.

He calls to us through Holy Scripture. At times, perhaps you have read a Bible passage and just known that it was meant for you. Or after hearing a section of the Bible read by different voices, with different pacing and inflections, you feel a pull in the core of your being to act or make a change. Maybe it just sets a seed that over time blossoms and grows into what God is calling you to do.

There are times when God calls to us through nature and people around us. When we are hurt or scared and someone lays a comforting arm across our shoulders, God is calling us by name, reminding us that we are not alone. The beauty of nature reminds us that we are stewards of his creation. There are a myriad of ways that he calls to us to care for our world and the people in it. Through the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, those in prison, and all those on the margins of society, God calls to us to care for his people. The question is, will we answer God's call to us?

“Here I am” is a response to a call, but it can also be a plea to be seen. “See me. Stop looking through me. Stop letting your glance slide over me like I am ghost. Stop ignoring me and pretending I don't exist. Here I am. This is me.” This plea can come from those who feel unloved or feel unworthy of love. It comes from those pushed to the side or who get walked over in the rush to get ahead. It comes from those who the world sees as lesser-than or insignificant. As followers of Christ, we are called to respond, “I see you. Here I am.”

“Here I am” is loaded with meaning. It means being fully present with the person in front of you—ignore your cell phone; turn off the TV or computer; focus all your attention on them. Be a servant to God's people. It means sharing with them the same love you have been given through the love and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This doesn't mean you are asking them if they have accepted Jesus as their savior. What it does mean is that you are sharing God's love through acts of agape, unconditional love. Actions speak much louder than words.

If you google the phrase ‘here I am’, you will either get a page full of websites about the story in 1 Samuel or a page of different music artists who have written a song entitled “Here I Am”. There are quite a few, both religious and secular. It was Dolly Parton's song and music video of “Here I am” released in 2018 that pulled me in as it addresses both the plea to be seen and the willingness to act. The video follows a mourner visiting a grave, a homeless man begging for help, a child scared by her parents fighting, an elderly woman sick in bed, and a young girl at school whose different appearance results in being ignored and bullied, as Dolly sings:

If you need a love that's true
Need someone to stand by you...
If you need a helping hand, need someone to understand
Here I am, oh here I am, ...
Here I am, reaching out to give you love that you're without
I can help you find what you've been searching for...
Because I've got so much love to give
I need someone to share it with...
Here I am...

As the music video progresses, someone invites the homeless man to share a meal, sits at the table with them and begins a conversation. The mother goes to her child's bedroom to console her. The sick woman's husband brings a meal to the bed, and when she is too weak to feed herself, he does it for her. A young boy befriends the girl who was bullied. And the mourner moves forward into a new relationship. These are all examples of how God calls to us in the mundane, everyday moments of life to share the love and light of Christ.

Epiphanies, holy encounters, happen when you least expect it. They happen in the most unlikely places. And when they happen, we may wonder, what do I have to offer? What can I give to God when he calls to me? The answer lies in the last stanza of the hymn "In the Bleak Midwinter":

What can I give him,
poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd,
I would bring a lamb,
if I were a wise man
I would do my part,
yet what I can I give him,
give my heart.

Our hearts. Our love. These are what we have to give to God and the world around us. Look. Listen. God is calling to you. How will you answer?

Amen

Works Cited

Here I Am. Dolly Parton and Sia. 2018. Music Video. <www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPgOV7M1J9g>.

Rossetti, Christina. "In the Bleak Midwinter, Hymn #112." *The Hymnal 1982*.