

**“COME AND SEE”**  
**1 Samuel 3:1-10; Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; John 1:43-51**  
**January 15, 2006**  
**Martin Luther King, Jr., Sunday**  
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Over the last few weeks at our home, we have been involved in a construction project to renovate our kitchen. One of the first things we did was to add new lighting, which meant climbing in to the attic, cutting holes in our ceiling and placing new fixtures in areas where none had previously been. Last year at Christmas we blew in bags and bags of insulation. Let me tell you, it works: I'm not talking simply about the fact that our heating bills went down after we added the insulation; the insulation also added to the sound barrier between the attic and house. As I've crawled around in the attic over the last few weeks, I have often done so trying to hear directions from the rooms below. Just a little more to the left - no, to the right - perfect. Because of the order of things in our project, we always had several things going on at once: drywalling in one area, while adding the dishwasher in another; painting in one place while working with lighting in another; building temporary walls at the same time we were taping and mudding in the newly created pantry. There has been a whole lot going on in a pretty small space. Several times when I was in the attic, rather than crawling out of recesses of the attic, I would simply holler—sure that I heard something from my father-in-law who has been guiding us in much of our building process. “One more time, I didn't hear you.” Or, “Could you repeat that?” Or sometimes, even, “Huh? I can't hear you!” Most often the response I ended up with in return was, “I didn't say anything.” The muffled voices I was hearing were coming from another conversation in the house. Perhaps it had been Grace playing with her dolls or someone announcing they were moving a ladder in front of a door. Whatever the case, I was mishearing the voice. So I know just a little bit about what Samuel might have been experiencing.

A lot of my problem with this construction project is that I know just enough about home renovations to be dangerous. I'm a bit hyper-aware of my lack of experience, so I am always asking questions, always trying to get just a bit more information, always talking through the steps of a project one extra time so I know I have it just right. And when I finally move into a project, I'm a bit tentative and still ready for advice, even when I can probably do it without one more verbal run through. Tentative, still ready for more lessons; ready, but still unsure. This could describe my own reality about home remodeling; but these are phrases that could just as easily be used to describe the Samuel we meet in our scripture lesson for today. Here he is, studying and ministering under Eli; yet when the big moment comes, he is clearly not ready for it. He is preparing for ministry, but the key part of this set of verses comes in the first verse when it says that Samuel was ministering UNDER Eli: Eli was the teacher and Samuel the student. And when the voice of the Lord is heard by Samuel, he doesn't quite know what to do. I think this is because his teacher is not hearing the voice and, therefore, unable to lead him. At that moment, Samuel has to begin to stand on his own a little bit. I love the interaction between Samuel and Eli; I can't help but think that by the third time Samuel comes bouncing into the room—assuming that Eli had called him—Eli has probably had it with his pupil. Enough already;

what are you talking about? The making of a frustrated teacher; but somehow, even though he wasn't hearing the voice, Eli was able to make sense of Samuel's experience and prepare him to answer the call of God. The mentor advises his pupil and steps out of the way: "Tell the Lord, 'Your servant is listening.'" And so he was—with a lot of help; and, thus, God called Samuel.

The Gospel reading for today is also a story of "call." This time our reading is from John's depiction of the call of the disciples. Our lesson follows the "call" of Peter and focuses on how Phillip and Nathaniel came to be among those we know as "the disciples." Our passage seems to note that Phillip became one of the disciples in a relatively easy fashion. That is, Jesus found Phillip and asked him to follow, and he did. Nathaniel, on the other hand—that is another story. In fact, I think it is a story that is more in line with how I think most of us would react if we had lived in that time and encountered Jesus. Nathaniel comes to be counted as one of the disciples only after his skepticism and biases are overcome by the fact that Jesus can reel off the details of where Nathaniel had recently been sitting. Nathaniel was originally not too impressed with this Jesus guy. In a statement akin to "my school is better than yours," Nathaniel of Galilee disparages Jesus by wondering if anything good can come from Nazareth? It takes the "mini-miracle" for Nathaniel to actually believe that Jesus might be something special. At that point, he very quickly jumps behind Jesus and agrees to follow him. Jesus, of course, is careful to downplay his vision that finally convinced Nathaniel and promises that there is much more in store for the future.

The statement that stands out in this passage and, I think, could have been heard also in Samuel, is Phillip's invitation to Nathaniel as he tries to convince Nathaniel that Jesus is worth following. "Come and see": it is an invitation, the same one Samuel had to hear when he figured out that it was the Lord's voice he was hearing. "Come and see" is the message that Phillip tried to use to convince Nathaniel that Jesus was important enough for the investment of his time and energy. Yet, I suspect, that if Jesus hadn't reeled off that little "fig tree" story, Nathaniel would have kept right on walking and would have missed out on playing an important role in the life and ministry of Jesus. Imagine Nathaniel sitting around, years later, lamenting the one that got away. "Come and see": it doesn't sound too difficult, yet accepting that invitation changed his life forever; and it so easily could have been missed.

Samuel and Nathaniel are both examples of people who made choices about following God; and for them, it had life-changing consequences. This is not simply a "call" to be there; it is a "call" to do something. I actually believe that Phillip's invitation to Nathaniel is missing one key piece: it should read, "Come, see, and do," because for Samuel and Nathaniel, once they accepted their calls, they weren't just observers. Samuel ended up being called to displace his mentor—undoubtedly an uncomfortable role, but one that prepared him for all the Lord would call him to in the future. Nathaniel ended up being in the inner circle and, thus, an intimate witness to the life and ministry of Jesus. Neither of these people, once called, sat passively by; and that, I think, is the compelling link between them. Although neither of them completely understood what it was they were being called to, they heard their call and acted upon it; and with God leading them, their lives changed forever.

On this weekend when we celebrate the life of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., these stories of “call” are, I believe, the perfect things for us to hear. I suspect when Martin Luther King began to speak against the racial injustices that confronted him he never understood he would one day stand before microphones in Washington, D.C. and present a story of his dream and, thus, inspire millions. I suspect for all of the bold moments that mark the life of Dr. King, there were moments of great doubt and fear when he would have much rather faded into the multi-colored tapestry of American culture and been anonymous. I suspect that even as Dr. King began preaching and teaching that there were moments when he wondered why God would call him, why anyone would bother to listen to his voice—a humble servant of God.

That, I think, is one of the most powerful legacies of Dr. King: he spoke up. A man called into ministry became one of the clearest voices for justice when he could just have easily been happy to be a great pastor to a congregation of good, quiet folks. Yet, for Dr. King and so many other faithful people, their understanding of “call” required them to do much more than just “come and see.” They found themselves taking steps into the unknown, into politically charged moments, into dangerous and holy places. It seems they could do nothing else!

The psalmist writes that “we have been wonderfully and fearfully made, that God is with us in our sitting down and in our rising up; that we have never been hidden from God, even when we were being made in secret...intricately woven in the depths of the earth.”

This is our assurance: all that is left is for us to do something with it. Let us honor the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King by being ready to do more than just “come and see.” Let us also do something, and join Samuel, Nathaniel, and Martin, and all the rest who stepped forward - even through the doubt and fear - and acted upon their faith. It is our call, too. Amen.