

October 13, 2013, 1 Samuel 3:1-21, - *Call of Samuel*

“God’s Purpose for YOU - 3”

Well, the Narrative Lectionary reading for today dovetails rather nicely with this little sermon series on discovering God’s purpose for you at this time in your life. The LORD speaks directly to Samuel as a young boy and spells out quite plainly what is his purpose. This kind of thing does happen to people. Really. Just as winning the Power Ball lottery happens. Your odds of that are about 1 in 176 million. Your odds of audibly hearing God’s voice telling you plainly what God wants you to do are also a bit long. It does happen. But pretty much every one of us and every one we know has to discover God’s purpose for them by a different route. It would be nice if every one of us heard a clear statement of call and purpose as Samuel did, but for reasons that are beyond me God doesn’t choose to operate this way.

This does not mean we are left to our own devices. We have resource. We have the resources of Scripture, the prophets, prayer, and each other. In the first week of this series I asked you to use the resource of each other by turning to the partner we had chosen and gently saying, “I wonder if part of God’s purpose for you might include . . .” Last week’s sermon challenge directed us to the resource of Scripture. I asked you to choose a Gospel, read through it and ask yourself, What is *Jesus’* mission in the world? What is he trying to accomplish? What does he do? What does he say? What does he ask other people to do? What upsets him? What makes him happy? In other words, Who is this guy who is the Son of God come to do God’s mission in the world? I asked you to do this because as the son of God Jesus reveals most clearly what is God’s mission in the world and also because one of the things the New Testament calls us to do is to become more Christ-like.

So I did that tis past week. Read through a Gospel and asked myself just those questions. The Gospel I chose, at random, was Mark’s. here’s what I found. What does Jesus do? He teaches, casts out demons, heals the sick, both insiders and outsiders–this might say something about our mission together as followers of Jesus. He goes off to pray rather frequently. He exercises dominion over nature by calming a storm and walking on water–don’t tink I’m up to that. He forgives sins, and I am up to that because in another Gospel Jesus says, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven.” Jesus also dines with tax collectors and sinners–and also with Pharisees. He not only dines, he feeds the hungry. He breaks rules when doing so helps someone in need. He welcomes children, speaks in riddles or parables–and explains them to those who ask. He observes Passover, claims kingship, and raises the dead. That’s a long list of things that might well be included in God’s purpose for each one of us, individually and together.

What does Jesus say? He says the Kingdom of God is near and that we should turn our lives around and believe in the Good News. He says, “Follow me; do not fear, only believe;” and “your faith has saved you, made you well.” And he points out how the traditions of the elders can go against the commandments of God.

What does Jesus ask of others? He asks a lot. He asks us to follow him and to take up our own cross. He also asks us to go out into the world and do the work that he is doing. These are all tall

orders. What he asks us to do is fairly simple. But it's not easy. One more thing: Jesus often asks those whom he has healed to keep quiet about it. Scholars refer to this as the Messianic Secret. And it is perhaps the one thing that Lutheran Christians, traditionally, are really, really good at.

What upsets Jesus? He is angered by those who oppose his healing. And he sighs deeply at the unbelief that swirls around him, especially because he sees it so often in his own disciples.

Mark presents a very emotional Jesus. He is moved with pity, has compassion, and loves those who are seeking God's purpose for themselves. That's the story of the rich man, the man who walked away sorrowfully because Jesus had advised him to sell his possessions, give the proceeds to the poor, and follow him. Mark's comment about this exchange is that Jesus loved this man.

That's what I found in my reading. What did you find in yours? If you haven't done it yet, do so. Your reading may be a little bit different from mine because your experiences and your point of reference is different from mine, and those things are a vitally important part of shaping God's purpose for you at this time.

And now I want to say a word about today's reading. The first part of today's Scripture is absolutely marvelous. It's a *Here I Am, Lord* moment. God calls; Samuel responds. God uses the unexpected, even a child, to accomplish God's purposes.

The second part of the story is a bit disturbing. Eli does not raise his sons well; they are engaging in abusive practices, and Eli has not stopped it. It takes Eli, who should know better, a while to figure out that God is calling Samuel. Samuel's message is a harsh one. But this is the nature of leadership. God doesn't call people into pleasant situations. God calls people because things are not right. People are called into leadership not because times are ideal but precisely because they are not.

Here's how bad things are: those in charge are acting in a greedy and uncaring manner. Visions are rare, and (pun coming) Eli's sight is going. The LORD continues to appear but is not seen. The older generation no longer sees God's vision. So Eli is uncalled and Samuel is called. Later Samuel will be uncalled and David called. The older generation's time is up, and God is raising up new leadership. God raises up new leadership because what is going on is not OK with God.. Yet Eli still has a role. He clues Samuel in to how to respond to God's call. Eli also responds well to what God is up to. This story may have something to say to my generation and our purpose at this time of our lives.

In our confession of sin we said, "So often we have failed to recognize your voice." Can we all agree to stop doing that? Now, it's true that unless we are among the lucky few, like Samuel, discovering God's purpose for our lives and for our life together is going to take some work. But we are not left to our own devices. God has given us the resources of each other, the resource of Scripture, especially in my judgement the prophets and Jesus, and the resource of prayer. Let's use them and see where God might yet lead us.