

Samuel was one of the great figures of the Old Testament. He anointed King Saul and King David and he was often the spiritual advisor to both. We learn from before his birth that Samuel was a gift of a child. At age 3 Hannah gave Samuel back to God to serve Him. Samuel grew up with Eli the priest, serving at the Lord's tabernacle.

Today, how amazing it is to hear God's clear call to Samuel. By name, no less, he calls: "Samuel! Samuel!" I want to hear God's call loud and clear. Don't you? Where will God call to us? How will he call? What will he call us to do? I love this Samuel story, for it opens our ears. Yes, God does call to us! Listen! Do you hear? JESUS SPEAKS TO US FROM HIS HOUSE, IN HIS PERSON, SO WE CAN SPEAK FOR HIM.

I. Where will the Lord call to us? Wherever He pleases! He could call to us in some place crowded with unbelievers. Abraham, father of all the faithful, was with the moon worshippers in Syria. Or God could call to us in some deserted wasteland. Moses was alone shepherding his flock at desolate Mount Sinai when God called him. In today's Gospel, Nathanael had been under the fig tree when he came to hear the Lord's voice. The Lord will call to us wherever, whenever he knows best.

But we can expect much more. Where has the Lord promised to call to us? Same as for Samuel, the Lord has promised to call to us in his holy house.

Samuel was right there at God's tabernacle, the Lord's worship home. "And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision" (v 1b). Did God have nothing to say? Or was he opening the ears of a new servant?

The aged priest was becoming helpless. Worse, he was going spiritually blind. The previous chapter tells how Eli was honoring his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, above the Lord! He was letting them continue to serve as priest even though they used their calling to hurt the helpless.

So Eli "was lying down in his own place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out" (vv 2b–3a). Against the darkness, the Lord always continues shining!

"Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was" (v 3b). See this! Where will the Lord call to you? God speaks to us from his house.

After the Lord calls Samuel three times and Samuel runs to Eli thinking it was him, At last it dawns on the high priest. Who was calling, calling, calling for Samuel? Samuel has been sleeping in the courtyard, by the Lord's tabernacle tent. Could the voice be coming from the very ark of God? The throne of the Lord! Into that gold-plated box four hundred years before, Moses had placed the twin stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. Every year since, on the one Day of Atonement, the lone high priest had poured over the ark the warm blood of the sacrificed lamb. Just so, God's mercy covers his justice.

In all his years as high priest, forty years ruling Israel, had Eli once heard the voice of the Lord? Had Eli expected the Lord to speak up? But there God had promised to be for his people!

Where has God promised to speak to us? Where but in his holy house? “Where two or three are gathered” in his name (Mt 18:20), there God has promised to call to his faithful people.

Eli tells the boy, “Go, lie down, Samuel. And when next he calls you, say, ‘Speak Lord, for your servant hears.’” What a prayer for you and me today! Lord, you have gathered us here in your name. Open our ears to hear you speaking, to listen to your words calling to us.

II. How will the Lord call to us here? However He pleases! To Abraham he called in some vision (Gen 15:1). To Moses he called from the strange burning bush. To Nathanael he came as the stranger from nowhere Nazareth. The Lord will call to us in whatever way he knows is best.

But we can count on much more than that. The Lord has told us where to listen. How has he promised to call? Same as for Samuel, the Lord has promised to call to us in his own person!

The fourth time, Samuel did not simply hear the Lord’s voice. It says, “The Lord came and stood” there calling, “Samuel! Samuel!” (v 10a). The almighty Lord, he who had promised to be present with his people invisibly. He, who hovered enthroned above the ark of the covenant. For Samuel, he wraps himself in some human form. He “stands there” to call the boy!

Has not God promised to do even more for us! Not just for the moment pretending to be human, so that we might hear his call. God’s Word actually “became flesh and dwelt among us.” John’s Gospel marvels, “The Word was made flesh. He tabernacled, he tented, among us!” (cf. John 1:14).

This same Jesus—he who showed himself to Samuel, who was born our Brother, who called Nathanael. He who promises to be here where two or three gather in his name. For us, he will come, stand here with us.

And Jesus’ standing with us is every bit as real as it was with Samuel that night. Truth is, we today understand far more clearly why he stood with Samuel—and with us. The Lord didn’t come to Samuel because he was any less sinful than Hophni or Phinehas or Eli. He came because of the sins of Samuel—and Hophni and Phinehas and Eli and you and me—the sins that made the word of the Lord rare in those days, that would in fact have made impossible any communication between sinful us and the holy God—those sins have been taken away. Christ Jesus came to stand *with* in order to stand *in*—to stand in for us under the punishment of all sin. That was the cross.

So now we await the last call: “My sister, my brother, rise up! My beloved, come home!” And we will see him, flesh and blood, our risen Lord!”

Can't you wait? You don't have to! Already today, in this house, he's promised to speak to us. How? By his Book. By his Word proclaimed even from this pulpit. His Word is here for all.

You want him to call you by name? Already today, in this house, he's promised to name you. How? By his water. He calls, "Jacob John. By name, you, you, I baptize you. By the power of my name, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

But you want him here for you today, your real Brother, all alive? Already this day, in this house, he has promised. By his bread, his wine, he calls! "This is my body, this my blood, for you!"

That's why we keep coming to worship. That's why we set aside time for private devotions. That's why we gather together for Bible study and to speak our faith with friends. We live to hear God's call to us, the living voice of Jesus!

III. Ours is a surprising God. Who could guess where and how he promises to call to us? In his house, in his person, he calls us! Ours is a surprising God. Who could believe for what purpose he's called us?

What will he call you to do? Well, whatever he wants! Abraham, at age 75, God called to move to the other side of his world, and at age 99, to father new nations. Moses, the fugitive murderer after forty years, still hiding from Egypt, God called to go straight back to Egypt to lead his enslaved people free. Nathanael, awed at his first sight of Jesus, Jesus called to see and believe still more. Whoever we are, however long or four our history, God will call us to do whatever he knows is best.

But we can expect much more than that! Same as for Samuel. What will the Lord call you to do? God calls us to speak for him.

The Lord called Samuel to speak a hard word. Namely, that Eli and his sons would no longer be priests. The only Good News was that the Lord—no matter how blocked his priests' ears, no matter how faithless his people's hearts—the Lord will break through anew to make His Word known.

Sometimes, the Lord does call us to speak a hard word. We do our friends no favor when we leave them wallowing in sin's quicksand. But even when we must shout warnings, the Lord calls us to throw to the sinking his lifeline, Jesus' death for their forgiveness. His Word rescues. His Word gives life.

In every area of our lives, God calls us to serve others in that vocation. We get to love and serve with his strength, just as he loves and serves us. He has placed you in the world just where he needs you.

Like Samuel the first and second and third time, maybe we did not recognize that the Lord was calling to us. Yet he does call. He calls to us gathered here in his home. He calls through his living Word. He calls us to sing his praises everywhere.

Like Samuel, will we answer with humble, heartfelt faith? "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears!"