

Listening to God is hard. As we see in today's first lesson, it can be hard to know when God is calling in the first place. However, even after we open ourselves to hear God's message, that is no guarantee that the hard part is over. Some lectionaries end the reading from 1 Samuel when Samuel says "Speak, for your servant is listening." They skip the most difficult part of the lesson – that following God means telling the truth regardless of how hard it might be. They skip the part when Samuel is given a message of punishment and retribution about the man who has raised him, the man who figured out that God was calling Samuel and the man who guided Samuel's spirituality. Samuel is given a prophecy, not against some stranger, but against someone he knows and loves. However, there is a reward for telling the truth. The lesson closes by stating that Samuel grew up with the Lord and that all of Israel "knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord."

Following God's will is not easy. Quieting our own lives so that we can hear God is not even the most difficult part of living lives that shine with Christ's glory in the world. The most difficult part is doing what God says, regardless of the inconvenience, the difficulty or the pain. It is being courageous enough to hear God, and then courageous enough to follow through with what God is asking of us. We know from the Bible that God does not hesitate to ask people to change their entire life around to serve God's purpose for them. In the Gospel today Jesus tells Philip to follow him. He does this regardless of the fact that Philip has family, has a job, has a home. Jesus simply tells Philip to follow him. And Philip does. Not only does Philip follow Jesus, he goes and tells Nathanael about Jesus. Their lives will never be the same again. In fact, their lives will likely be much more difficult and painful because of the choice they made to follow Jesus. Samuel is asked to tell the difficult, painful truth and Philip and Nathanael are asked to leave all their security to follow God. These acts seem irresponsible and nonsensical. But from the perspective of today are there any of us who would say that they made the wrong choice? Would we not like to think that we would make similar choices in their situation? We claim that we want to follow God and Christ, but do our actions really support our claim?

I know that I choose sometimes to ignore God, or not to listen for God's voice in the first place. I know that God's opinion of what matters is different from what I think matters right now and frankly I don't want God's agenda to interrupt my carefully laid plans. But as a Christian that is what I have pledged to do. I have promised to

“seek and serve Christ in all persons” and “to follow and obey [Christ] as my Lord.” Being a Christian means inconveniencing myself for the welfare of the other members of God’s creation. Being a Christian does not mean that I merely trust that I am saved through Christ (though that’s important). It means that I devote my life to following Christ. While I am not advocating burning yourself out to help others (after all, we are also members of God’s creation) I am asking that you truly look inside for God’s call to you today, to be open to the interruption and plan changes that God might be asking for.

Because these inconvenient interruptions lead to something wonderful. I went to college knowing that I wanted to become a psychologist. I found the field fascinating and believed that I could really help people through psychology. As you may have noticed, those plans changed. And now, I’m glad those plans changed. I feel fulfilled in working towards becoming a priest in ways I did not when contemplating a career in psychology. I’m not saying I always listen to God, as I’ve mentioned earlier, I often don’t. But the good news is that even when what God asks goes counter to what society says is better, God’s way really is the better path. Perhaps this is not evident right away, but eventually following God leads to greater joy than anything we can do on our own. Samuel became known as a trustworthy prophet throughout Israel. His willingness to relate the hard messages from God meant that people trusted him and respected his knowledge of God’s will. Samuel was able to lead and guide the people of Israel for most of his life because people knew that they could depend upon his honesty. He shone clearly with God’s light in the world.

It’s a scary thing to listen for God, after all, you might actually hear God’s message for you. But don’t let fears of short term inconvenience, difficulty or pain keep you from listening to and following God’s call. God sees what we don’t want to see or can’t see. Following God may not (and probably won’t) lead to great success by society’s standards. But to live a life that is filled with God is more satisfying and rewarding than a life spent trying to “win” by the rules of our culture. So listen for the big and small messages God is sending. Is it donating time to a good cause? Is it starting a program to help all God’s creation thrive? Is it taking the time to talk to a stranger who looks anxious and sad? Is it truly listening to a friend or family member? Is it buying energy efficient light bulbs? Is it taking a new job? It could be a million things. I don’t know where God is calling you to next, or what God is asking of you. However, I guarantee that God is calling and asking. So let’s join Samuel and Philip in listening to and following God’s call, moving forward audaciously to bring God’s kingdom on earth a little closer.