

Second Sunday After Epiphany
January 15, 2012
Ordinary Life Rhythms: Hearing

I have often thought, such as at O'Hare, as I walk by people or as people are walking by me, that they say, "Hi, how are you" – that they are talking to me,

Then I realize they are speaking to themselves.

In those instances, I quickly look to see if a Bluetooth device is hanging from their ear before I decide whether they are a little crazy or not

But the majority of people who seem to be talking to themselves are actually hearing voices – via their cell phones.

As the people of God – do we hear voices?

Specifically, do we hear the voice of God?

Do we hear God calling our name?
As God called Samuel?

We may not be aware of or tuned into God's voice, until we like Samuel heed Eli's instruction and respond with (just in case it is God), "Speak, Lord for your servant is listening"

And then, we just may find ourselves entering into a conversation with God (without the help of a cell phone).
Our question this morning – in the midst of our ordinary lives
– How are we as a community to respond to God when God calls our names?

I remember an incident when Lynne and I were calling Heather's name when she was 2 years old at Simpson UMC.

Hiding so did not respond – until in the same room and then jumped out and shouted, "Surprise, here I am!"

Not sure that is the best way for us to respond to God – though I at times in my life have found that this is the way I have responded – waiting on God to find me, rather than me responding to God when God is calling me.

What we hear God saying to us and how we respond to God shapes the ordinary rhythms of our lives.

In the New Testament Jesus calling of us often involves an invitation – "Follow me!"

This is what Philip heard and in response he invited his friend Nathaniel to come and follow Jesus as well.

Nathaniel's response was not the same as Philip's:
"Can anything good come from Nazareth?"

Philip's response was "Come and see for yourself"

The question that changed everything for Nathaniel – “How do you know me?” came in response to Jesus naming him: “here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”

Nathaniel heard his name and it led him into a conversation with Jesus.

**What do we need to hear from God;
OR, How do we need to hear God**

- in order to enter into a conversation with God?

For sure, hearing God requires intuition, imagination.

Ben Campbell Johnson, in *Speaking of God*, relates that we often hear God or a thought from God comes into our mind through “flashes of insight, hunches, creative vision – experiences that may be inspired by the Spirit.”

Johnson cautions that it would “be absurd to identify every intuition with the Spirit, [but it is equally] unwise to hold that the Spirit never comes through revelatory intuitions” (p. 103).

Johnson states further that those thoughts not inspired by the Spirit “do not hold lasting significance but slip back into the unconscious like a dream that cannot be remembered the morning after” (p. 103).

Hearing God through positive Spirit guided intuitions are ones that take hold of us and need to be cultivated and nurtured.

Likewise, hearing God requires imagination.

My friend Alan Roxburgh expresses that “Imagination is first of all about the capacity to use forms of thinking other than linear, cause-and-effect, and ordered. It is thinking that is creative, outside the box, intuitive,[and] unexpected according to accepted knowledge and wisdom” (*Missional Leader*, 146).

Imagination needs to be cultivated.

And as the people of God, we are called to cultivate a biblical imagination,

An imagination that is rooted in God’s Story and Vision, so that we might hear God.

This is what was expressed about Samuel: “Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him” (1 Sam. 3:7).

Roxburgh further relates, “the biblical narratives are full of stories about places and people without hope who become centers of the Spirit’s creative, world-changing activity. . . .

[And, so], we, like the people of these biblical stories, are invited to cultivate our imagination to see the possibilities of what the Spirit of God wants to do in and among the people [of God]” (p. 17).

The more we root ourselves in God’s Story and Vision – the more our intuition and imagination will be cultivated and attuned to hear God speaking to us in the ordinary moments of our everyday lives.

So how do we begin to train our ears, our hearts, our lives – to hear God in the daily rhythms of our living?

I am in the process of learning how to speak Spanish.

I am using a series of CDs, in 30 minute segments, which require me to vocalize what I am learning – known as the Pimsleur method.

I have just gone through 3 lessons, and “intiendo un poco d’Español”

I can now understand a conversation that was presented in the first unit.

By learning Spanish, my ears are becoming attuned and trained to hear what is being said as I listen to a conversation in *español*.

Similarly, to hear God, we need to acquire ears and hearts that are familiar with the rhythms and ways of God

We do this

- through regular engaging of Scripture
- through conversation with God in prayer
- and conversation with one another in spiritual dialogue.

Opportunities for engaging Scripture:

1. Scripture reading plans: 1, 2, 3 year available online
2. Weekly Scripture engagement – following liturgy – Irish website: *sacred space.ie*
3. Weekly preparation for our Sunday worship: Scripture texts and theme
4. Saturday morning small group on *Engaging Scripture Together* – going over Sunday texts well in advance in order to hear what God is saying to us as a community – multi-perspective engagement of texts.

Opportunities for Conversation with God:

1. Sunday morning prayer times
2. As engage in reading Scripture – God’s Story and Vision – listen to what God is saying to you, what intuitions is the Spirit bringing to your mind, what imagination is being shaped?

Respond to God thinking and talking about these things – enter into conversation with God.

Relate insights to needs in lives of others and yourself; notice what new things God is leading you into.

Opportunities for Spiritual Conversation:

1. *During worship*, sharing of God moments, encounters, insights with one another in our community – here is where you can try out speaking out loud what noticing God is doing

2. *During Christian Formation* – participate in spiritual conversation about themes we are addressing
3. *During fellowship times and other times* – still keep talking about what going on in our lives about family, work, kids, vacations, etc.,

But add to such conversation how we are doing spiritually, questions about God, about Jesus – bring God into our conversations more so than merely saying “O, God” or “God, yes” as an emotional expression.

These are just some ways – there are many more, only limited by our imaginations, as to how we can tune our ears and hearts to hear the voice of God, the voice of Jesus in the ordinary moments of our lives.

May we, in the midst of the rhythms of our lives cultivate ears that hear, eyes that see the voice and actions of God all around us.

Communion is also a time to attune ourselves to the voice of God as Jesus invites us to dine with him at his Table . . .