

Sign-up Sheet

"Get on with it."

I Samuel 3:7-10

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On the Spot

Not long ago I went to a meeting. Most of the people who were there were new to me, but their cause was one that I consider of real importance. I listened to others speak with passion and resolve. They complained about injustices and imagined improvements; and I was right in there with them.

Until one of them, the leader of the group, announced that she was going to poll every one of us – all around the table – asking for our personal commitment to take a specific stand at a specific moment.

One-by-one, out loud: have you ever been put on the spot?

Wait a minute I thought. You want me to do what? Put my money where my mouth is? Put the rubber on the road? Go way out on a limb? Be...committed?

Funny, what it feels like when you're challenged to move from having an opinion to making a commitment.

You can be the most opinionated person in the world, but without commitment, it hardly means a thing.

Commitment is the stuff that covenants are made of; your commitments say who and what you belong to; they give your life shape.

That's why an old National Council of Churches 16 mm movie, that I only heard described a long time ago, has continued to trouble me through the years.

One scene after another showed crowds of people taking a stand. There were scenes of people rallying in a union meeting; protesters carrying signs and chanting slogans; throngs of people gathered along a Havana street cheering a military parade of marching soldiers and passing tanks; even a dictator speaking to the masses of people lifting their hands in devoted salute.

The very last scene showed a congregation filing out of a suburban sanctuary on their way to a parking lot. That's when the only narration in the entire film made its one-line statement: "Take a good look. This may be the last group of *uncommitted* people in the world."¹

Ducking and Jumping

Of course, that's a bit harsh. Yet, the unsettling effect of that film has me served well through the years. It's reminded me and pestered me, time-and-again, about the whole nature of our faith – of *my* faith the way it's supposed to be if it's to make any difference at all.

You can carry your opinions to your grave. Then, what will be their effect? For a while those who know you will say, "He was opinionated, wasn't he?" "You certainly knew where she stood." That's about it.

But your commitments: that's a different story. Your commitments are based on convictions for which you're willing to take a stand – do something about – and for good or ill will always affect the world you leave behind.

The writer of I Samuel says that the word of God was rare in the days of the prophet Eli and the boy Samuel. It was an era of spiritual famine, corruption in the structures of society, political intrigue, and social upheaval. Enemies are preparing to attack. These were dangerous times.

Then, what we hear of the boy in the Tabernacle is quite extraordinary. He may have slept by the Ark of the Covenant, the very center of God's inspiration; but he didn't have a clue when the word of the Lord sounds forth.

Clueless: because it was been ages since anyone received a vision. Years: and no one had heard a word. And he was just a kid. So why would God speak then; and why would God speak to him; and how on earth would he ever know it?

You read this kind of thing and it can get you to wondering. Will God speak to anybody? Can God decide to speak to me? Would God speak to you?

There's a Bible scholar who says you have to be careful about the way you interpret this scripture. He says this isn't "a simple story of God's call and the way in which we

often fail to recognize it...," it isn't "a narrative of Samuel's general religious awakening."²

That's probably true. This is a story how a particular boy was initiated into the unique role of Israel's prophet. And he became one of the greatest prophets of all time. It's a tale of God's word spoken at a specific point in history for a very specific purpose.

Yet there is never-the-less a lesson for you and me and everyone who ventures to read this story and takes it to heart.

When God ventures to speak to you: don't miss it. Listen. Then follow Eli's coaching and respond in two ways. Say, "Here I am, Lord. Speak, for your servant is listening."

Then do as you believe you were told. Commit yourself to the task.

There are many ways that God chooses to speak. You even see that in the scriptures.

A dream.

An insight.

A written word of scripture.

The feeling of outrage you get when you see something that cries out for your action.

A word said by a friend, a stranger, a preacher, a teacher

A growing compulsion to lay your life on the line for a person or a cause.

A friend in need of a friend: and though you've never helped in that way before you get this burning sense you have to do it.

Maybe even a phone call from a member of the Nominations Committee...

It's thought that in these days, when the world has become dangerous and unsettled, the word of the Lord is rare.

Maybe it isn't rare. Maybe God is as involved and just as vocal as any other time.

What if it's that people don't usually listen, don't often look, rarely expect?

What if it's just because people are slow to commit?

Here I Am

Oh, to sit at the table where you've made your opinion known and then be called on to take it further.

I sat at the table. The sign-up sheet was passed along. I watched it coming closer. And I thought to myself, "If I am really for this, then what am I willing to do about it?"

There comes a point when you need to get on with it.

"We renew our covenant faithfully to participate in the ministries of the church by our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness: church membership promises that's actually about something you get if you do them.

When you put your stake in the ground you're likely to find yourself.

Your commitment is who you are.

May you do something lasting for God...

May you listen and hear God's voice.

When the time comes, may you say, "Here I am Lord."

and sign up.

¹ As told by Hilbert Berger, retired elder in the Indiana Conference of The United Methodist Church and pioneer in stewardship education.

² Bruce C. Birch, "I Samuel", The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. © 1998. p 994.