

“Lord of the Sabbath”
2nd Sunday after Pentecost, June 2, 2024
FPC Marshfield
The Rev. Dr. Janet Wolfe

Texts: 1 Sam. 3:1-10, (Ps. 139:1-6, 13-18), (2 Cor. 4:5-12), Mark 2:23-3:6)

For our Old Testament lesson, we have another “call” story. Last week we heard the call of Isaiah. Today we have the call of Samuel. Samuel’s mother, Hannah, had been barren. When she was granted a child, she dedicated him to temple service and he went to live in the temple with the old priest, Eli. One night, when he was still a young boy, he was awakened by a call. He thought it was Eli. But after Eli assured him that he was not calling the boy, he suggested that perhaps God was calling him. So, the third time that Samuel heard a voice, he answered, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

Eli’s sons were corrupt, so they were not being called to follow in their father’s footsteps. But young Samuel was considered worthy by the Lord and he was called to step in. As he grew, he continued to listen to the guidance of God until he was old enough to assume the mantle of prophet.

How do we know when God is calling us? I was not sure what I wanted to do with my life. I had not succeeded at being a teacher, and I was beginning to wonder about going to seminary. On this particular day, I was scheduled to take my final exam for my masters in Political Science at the University of Colorado. I was undecided as to whether I wanted to start work on a Ph.D in Political Science or go to seminary. I was in the Protestant chapel playing the organ and trying to relax when someone came running in to say “There is a bush on fire!” I grabbed a can of water and ran outside. It turned out that a piece of burning trash from a fraternity’s incinerator had floated out and landed in the bush. But it reminded me of the call of Moses, when he saw a bush burning but not being consumed. That day, after the exam, I decided to go to seminary.

I imagine that each of you has some kind of a call story that brings you here. Maybe your parents or grandparents persuaded you to go to confirmation and what you learned there stayed with you. Or maybe you were looking for a community of people who would share a common faith with you. I know that several people have said that they noticed the “God Welcomes All” sign outside and the knitted rainbow colors at the entrances to the church parking lot. Whatever it was that brought you here, we hope you indeed feel welcome.

What are you called to do in the service of God and the church. Today, the Immigration Action Team presented one of their programs for making contact with the Mexican Consulate for those who need their services. More will be discussed over lunch, prepared by Carmen Ramirez. Though reservations were requested, you might ask Tracy Olson if you are interested in coming and you don't have a reservation. This is a particularly active church when it comes to seeking peace and justice and providing social services. We have hosted the Soup or Socks food pantry since its founding some thirty years ago. This past week members of the church assisted the United Way in packing Nutrition on Weekends food for those young people who may not have enough food at home. Many people in this church have been active in working with Habitat for Humanity in assisting families who need help with housing and home ownership. Deacons and others visit people in the hospital and in their homes, especially if they can't get out to church anymore. The Green Team has sponsored many projects to assist with the environment. We have one of the three Community Garden sites in Marshfield, we have a Native Prairie and a Butterfly Garden on our property, and we are in the midst of planning for a project with Solar Panels to provide electricity for our church. Our Matthew 25 commitment reminds us that we are called to serve those in need in our community.

Later in the service we will bid farewell to Greg and Beth Walsh, who are moving to Coos Bay, Oregon, this week. Though they are leaving our community after many years of service, I am sure they will be called to new ministries in Oregon.

Our gospel lesson raises the question of how we are to observe the Sabbath. Long gone are the days when everything was closed on Sunday. Jesus and his disciples were not keeping the Sabbath as strictly as some others expected. As they walked through a field, they harvested grain to have something to eat. Jesus healed a man with a withered arm on the Sabbath. This was not an emergency that could not have waited until the next day, but Jesus saw a need and met it even though it was the Sabbath. This got him into trouble with his adversaries, who were beginning to feel threatened by his ministries.

It is easy to blame the Pharisees for many of the problems in Jesus' day. But later, after the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, the Sadducees no longer had a place, as their main calling was to Temple work. The Pharisees laid the groundwork for Judaism after it became separated from Christianity. We should also remember that Jesus was a Jew, and he did not have a vision for separation between the two faiths. He and his disciples were regular participants in synagogue and temple worship. It is also important that we remember that it was not the Jews who killed Jesus. Some of the Jewish leaders collaborated with the Romans, partly to keep their jobs, but it was the Romans who killed Jesus. Crucifixion was their means of execution. Jews would have used stoning if they had been in charge.

So what is God calling us to do with the Sabbath? It is no longer Saturday, but Sunday for us, because Jesus rose on a Sunday. As we discussed last week, summer is beginning. School will be out this week. Most of us hope for a little more relaxed schedule in the summer. I am a big fan of Sunday afternoon naps. We all need rest and relaxation in order to function properly. However, as Jesus shows us in his healing, we

sometimes have to be available to help those in need, no matter what day it is. We expect medical personnel to be available 24/7 because people have needs at all hours. Now that we have videos of worship services, we can watch and participate at any time that we have available. This possibility was developed during the pandemic, when we were supposed to have as little contact with others as possible. For a while, only those necessary for worship leadership were actually here in the sanctuary; pastor, lector, musician, video operators. The rest of us were encouraged to take part online, providing our own communion elements. Now that we are back to participating in person, we still have that online option. I also appreciate the opportunity to have Zoom meetings because it saves time and gas not to have to go to church for every meeting.

We are very active in this church. Sometimes as part of our Sabbath observance, we need to set aside some time for prayer and contemplation. Kristina Kaiser has helped us with this. God is sometimes calling to us when we are in prayer or when we are resting, as we saw in the story of Samuel. I think God speaks to us in dreams, too. Sometime when I have not known what to do, I sleep and a solution comes to me in a dream.

So let us remain open to the ways that God calls us, whether it be in times of sabbath rest or when we are engaged in trying to help others through our many activities seeking peace and justice. Listen, God is calling! Are we listening?

Let us pray: God, we ask for your guidance as we seek your will for our lives. Help us to do what you would have us to do and to help those in need. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.