

June 3, 2018

Confirmation Sunday

Columbia Congregational Church

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18, 1 Samuel 3: 1-10, Acts 2: 16-21

Listening for God

Sermon by the Reverend Betsey Polglase

While this meditation is for all to hear, I have focused it for our 4 young women who will be confirming their baptism today.

You have spent eight months reading and learning about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit as well as checking off the items on my expectations list, including participation in class and in worship each month including reading scripture twice during those 8 months. I think we would agree you have done a good job.

Some of our best conversations though were about bullying, safety measures in your schools (after one of the school shootings), self-care, and what you experienced in other churches. Most classes you also offered comments or questions about the service, including the sermons and some of the announcements.

You each wrote a statement of your faith today and selected two passages that would come to mind in a time of joy or a time of trial. Your choices and your statements about your faith were impressive. You are each thoughtful and articulate.

So here you are prepared to confirm your baptism and become adult members of this church, even knowing that your understandings may change over time. Confirmation is not an end but just a step in your life's and your faith journey.

Megan and Beth, you read portions of Psalm 139 in which the psalmist declares God's intimate knowledge of you. It can be disconcerting that God knows your every move, every thought, even the words you are about to say. And yet it can be wonderful. God values each of you, loves you, and is with you. No matter what you face, good or difficult, God, this power of love, is right there beside you. I believe many of us in this room find comfort in that. We know God doesn't wave a magic wand, nor does God always give us what we ask for, even if we ask really nicely. However, in faith, we know

that God knows our true needs best, and, frustrating as that is, that is sometimes beyond our immediate understanding. We just have to accept.

The passage that Ashley read from 1 Samuel is the story of this young boy left in the care and instruction of the priest Eli. One reason I love this passage is that God is calling a child. While I would not call you children, the story makes it clear that God calls people of all ages to do and say extraordinary things. After Samuel mistakenly thinks it is Eli calling him in the middle of the night, wise but tired Eli finally realizes the boy is hearing God and he tells the boy to respond, “Speak Lord for your servant is listening.”

The point is God may speak to any one of us, and when God speaks God tends to be persistent. God might be calling any of you. You may not recognize it as God right away. It may feel like “following your intuition” not realizing it is God not your intuition who is guiding you.

As this church talks about how to become more vibrant and vital, we recognize how important your insight is. Some of us have been around for a while. We are used to things the way they are. We know what we know and that works for us. Perhaps we are like Eli, still doing the work of God, but feeling a bit tired and uncreative. Now I am not casting aspersions on the adults and seniors who work so hard, or who have reached a point in their lives where their active involvement is limited. But I am saying, we need you, the world needs you. We need you to listen for God’s direction and then to lead the way. We need not only your ideas but your willingness to put them into practice. That is, as Bryn’s reading from acts puts it, dream your dreams, listen to God, and speak your truths and participate in change.

That is not just limited to activities of the church. Find your passion, God knows what it is, and make a difference in the environment, in education, in the political arena, in the lives of your families and friends, wherever that passion leads. Sometimes that means less doing and more listening.

You may or may not hear God call you as clearly as Samuel did. It may simply be the Spirit stirring in your heart to do or say something, to take a stand even when your friends may not like it. You are not isolated in a temple like young Samuel. The whole world is pressing in on you and there are many voices urging you this way or that. Know

that God will never ask you, or want you to do anything that would harm yourself or cause harm to anyone else. That is the best way to distinguish between God's voice and all the others. We pray you are open to God's call, that you will listen, and respond. Remember the over-all theme of scripture is God's extraordinary love, and that we are to love God with all your heart and soul and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Let us pray: Holy One, you search us and know us better than we know ourselves. Give us vision. Give us ears to hear. Cause us to truly listen. Mold us into faithful servants. Amen.