

“Serving from Sunday to Sabbath”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts
June 2, 2024 - Second Sunday after Pentecost

[1 Samuel 3:1-10; Mark 2:23-3:6](#)

Have you ever been caught in a situation in which you wished that God would just speak up and tell you what to do, provide instructions for dealing with a particularly perplexing moment, or give you clarity when it seems you’re living in a murky fog?

We know that there are many moments in our lives when we could use such divine direction. The good news I have to share with you this morning is that God is still speaking, God is still casting visions, God is still showing us a blessed path for living, and God still guiding us down that path and leading us to enjoy lives filled more abundantly with more of God’s soul-satisfying life.

We heard in our lesson from 1 Samuel about our ever-speaking God calling out to the prophet Samuel by name three times at a time when the people of God could not hear the voice of God calling, when visions from God were rarely seen, and when even the people’s priest Eli was unable to sense God’s message. It was during that murky time, when God seemed to be hidden, when there seemed to be no direction for the people from God, that God spoke to Samuel...and Samuel listened.

This story of God calling and of a servant of God recognizing and listening to that voice of God is one that recurs throughout our scriptures. We heard another of these stories last Sunday in God’s calling of Isaiah. Others are also perhaps more familiar to us, such as God calling Moses from a burning bush to lead God’s people away from captivity in Egypt, or God calling Mary to bear and raise the Christ Child who would lead people from captivity to sin, and of God calling through Jesus a band of Apostles to leave their nets to follow him and become fishers of people, sharing with all the good news that in Christ God sets people free.

Our gospel lesson tells us about some of Christ’s freeing work that we, as Jesus’ disciples, are called to continue. We heard that Jesus was going through grain fields one Sabbath, and being hungry, plucked heads of grain to eat. To some

religious zealots who saw this work being done on the Sabbath day, a day to be honored and hallowed as a day of rest, Jesus was acting sinfully, and so they freaked out.

Their freak-out then ramped up to a murderous rage, leading them to conspire to have Jesus killed, after they witnessed him not only plucking and eating grain on the Sabbath, but *healing* someone on the Sabbath: “How dare he work on the Sabbath?!” Well, he dared to do this work, because this was the intention of God for the Sabbath all along: That people would find themselves renewed by stopping from their usual busyness for a while, to pause so that they might pay attention to how they are fed and healed by God. Jesus was called to feed and heal, *especially* on this special day for nourishment and renewal, and so he responded by faithfully doing this life-giving work on the people’s life-receiving day, even in the face of great opposition of those who worked to enforce their own rigid religious restrictions (and who seemed perfectly OK with working evil themselves on the Sabbath as they schemed and planned someone’s murder).

Jesus showed us that the right day to receive God’s blessings that lead us to experience more of God’s life welling up within us *is* the Sabbath day, which is still Saturday, by the way. And the right day to do good for others that leads them to experience more of God’s life *is* the Sabbath day. Truly, the right day to do God’s work that leads to more life is *every* day -- from the Sabbath, to Sunday, and throughout the rest of the week -- but we should be intentional in setting aside time, each week and, really, each day, to pause to pay attention to and give thanks for God’s presence, to listen for God’s voice, to look for God’s vision, that we may be better prepared for our life-giving, love-sharing work.

In our murky and foggy world, in which so much seems unclear and shrouded in mystery, we can be absolutely sure that the steps that lead us to living more faithfully in our calling to give love and grow life are the right steps and that the path of serving from Sunday to Sabbath is the right path. Let us all pay attention as God continues to call us on this good journey we share, let us heed that call, and let us move forward together in faith and love. Amen.