

***Here I Am***  
I Samuel 3:1-10  
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*His name was Sam, but he did not understand  
Though he was just a boy, God had a plan  
Sam heard a call from the great I am  
Immediately he said, "My name is Sam and here I am."  
But he ran not to God, he ran to the priest  
The priest was not interested, no, not in the least  
"I made no call. I made no sound.  
Now go and lay your head right back on the ground."*

Would you recognize the voice if God called you? There is something playful in the call of Samuel. The call catches everyone by surprise. Samuel does not know what to make of it so he runs to the priest. The priest is the only one Samuel can imagine would be calling at that hour of the night. The priest does not understand. He has no interest in the little boy when he eagerly shows up saying, "You called?" Eli dismisses the boy, "I did not call; go back and lie down."

Maybe Samuel and Eli are not the only ones surprised. Maybe this story surprises you. Is the God of the whole universe really in the business of jabbing little boys in the side and calling out their name? Surely there is another explanation for the voice Samuel heard. When Ebenezer Scrooge was confronted by the ghost of his former partner Jacob Marley Scrooge would have none of it. He blamed the appearance of the ghost on "A slight disorder of the stomach..." Dismissing the ghost of Marley Scrooge said, "You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato."<sup>1</sup> For Scrooge, the explanation was obvious. He had a bad case of indigestion, and it was nothing but the sour remnants of a turkey dinner talking to him.

As Samuel went back to sleep, maybe that thought crossed the mind of Eli, the old priest.

What a strange boy that boy named Sam.

Remind me to never feed him Green Eggs and Ham.  
We'll be awake all night and never get a wink of sleep  
Away from the pork that boy I must keep.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol and other stories*, p. 21.

But just as Marley's ghost was no figment of Scrooge's imagination, the voice Samuel heard was the voice of God. In this divine encounter, along with so many others, we discover the God we worship is in the business of jabbing little boys in the side and calling their name. And it is not just little boys. In so many ways God calls his children by name, and says, "Follow me."

- God calls us to go forth in new directions, tapping an old couple named Abram and Sarai to leave their home and journey to a new land.
- God's calls come to us like Moses, sending us to the halls of power to tell the Pharaohs of the world their time is up.
- God calls us to march around cities like Jericho, cities with thick and formidable walls, trusting only in the promise of God that walls will fall at the blast of the trumpet and sound of shouting voices.

Along with these grand and dramatic moments, we find God's call comes to us to shape our lives in ways that are profound, in ways that transform our lives and set us on a path of faithful living. We receive a call to love God with all our heart, our soul, our mind, and our strength. In the same way we are called to love our neighbor. That type of call is all consuming. God won't let Jonah run the other way. God sends us to love those who are foreigners, who are different than us, who might even be our enemies. God won't let us walk by the hungry, the poor, the thirsty, the homeless, the sick, the imprisoned, or even the stranger. God calls us to love the least of these just as if in these least ones we saw the very face of God. Indeed, in these ones the world might call the least we have the opportunity to meet Jesus face to face. So yes, our God is in the business of jabbing little boys in the side. God is in the business of calling their name. God is in the business of sending them to spread love and kindness and mercy and compassion wherever there is a soul that hungers or a heart that breaks.

As we begin a New Year, I invite you to listen for the call of God. I love the fact that God didn't give up when Samuel missed the call the first time...or the second...or the third. By the time the priest comes to his senses and tells Samuel that it is the Lord, it is the fourth time God called. Not to worry, our God calls and calls and calls, never willing to give up on us, seemingly never willing to accept our hesitancy. In Samuel's time we are told the word of the Lord was rare. If ever there was a time for God to stop extending the call that might have been the time.

The Book of Judges is one long failure as God's people chose to do what was right in their own eyes. Over and over the people got into trouble because of their

hard hearts and disobedience. Time after time they cried out to God. Time after time God raised up a judge. Time after time God rescued the people. And time after time they immediately resumed their old and tired habit of going their own way. If ever there was a time for God to stop extending the call that might have been the time.

But instead of giving up, God jabbed a little boy in the side and called out his name. Samuel. Samuel. Samuel. Samuel. When Samuel finally figured out it was the Lord calling him, he said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

When someone says, “Here I am”, like Samuel said, “Here I am”, it is really an inspiring thing. The bible is filled with stories of faithful servants who heard the voice of God and said, “Here I am”. It is not just the pages of the bible that are filled with ones who answer God’s call. Each of our lives have people in them who have heard the call and who have responded, “Here I am”. My mom was a wonderful person. Her name was Clara Eberly. Before she married my dad, her name was Clara Meyer. She and my dad came to visit us when we were living in Houston. Our kids were all young. One day when the kids were at school, we were sitting at the breakfast table. She had with her a mission yearbook from the Brethren in Christ Church. The Brethren in Christ Church played a very important role in my mother’s life. My mom’s mom died when my mom was six or seven, and then her dad had a debilitating stroke. It was the members of that small church in her small town who stepped forward and took my mother and her siblings into their homes. Those members of the Brethren in Christ Church heard God’s call to help a whole bunch of children who needed a home. That church opened their hearts to love those children. The Brethren in Christ Church said, “Here I am!”

Well, that day at our breakfast table, my mom handed me a copy of the Brethren in Christ mission yearbook from the year 1949 or 1950. She showed me a page in the book where the church had sent out an urgent request. They needed a nurse to move to New Mexico and serve as the nurse and midwife on a Navajo Indian Reservation. My mom was about 21 years old at the time. She was both a nurse and a midwife. Recounting the response to that urgent plea for a nurse they wrote in the mission yearbook, “Clara Meyer answered the call to serve as a nurse and midwife on the Navajo Indian Reservation.” I cannot begin to describe the feeling of admiration that filled my heart when I realized my mom had heard God’s call and said, “Here I am.” Unbeknownst to my mom a young man named Carl Eberly also heard God call him to serve as the maintenance manager on the reservation, and by the time they finished their service in 1952 they were Carl and Clara Eberly. What a wonderful legacy they left for us.

When my mom was in the hospital, having suffered a stroke, and spending her last days here on earth, I was with all my siblings as we came together during that difficult time. One day my sister was keeping watch at the hospital. She sent a

text to all of us that said, Abraham and Zeuide came by the hospital to visit my mom. Who were Abraham and Zeuide? In 1990 Abraham and Zeuide fled trouble in the African nation of Eritrea, and resettled as refugees in, of all places, Hanford, California, my hometown. Living in a new land is not an easy experience, and it was a tremendous blessing and help for Abraham and Zeuide to have been sponsored by the First Presbyterian Church in Hanford, California. Abraham and Zeuide have had some incredible stories of success and blessing in their life. Their oldest daughter received a full ride scholarship to UC Berkeley in 2007, and now has a college degree. When she received that scholarship in 2007, the church wrote an article in their newsletter recounting the many people who had befriended their family. At one point in the article there was a single sentence that brought tears to my eyes. It said when the family arrived in Hanford, “Carl and Clara Eberly offered their home until the family could find an apartment.” Now, twenty-two years later, Abraham and Zeuide came to the hospital to visit my mom, and to pray for her. That beautiful friendship started when the church said they needed a home for a family in need and my mom and dad raised their hands and said, “Here I am.”

I guess I am thinking of my mom, whose name was Clara, hearing God’s call and saying, “Here I am”, because we have had a very special treat this past week. Our son Jake and his wife Bridget came to visit and they brought our two grandchildren. Our youngest grandchild is named Paul, and we have been amazed at quickly he is growing and maturing and developing his own personality. Our granddaughter is two and a half years old. Her name is a very special name for our family. Her name is Clara. We have played so many games I can’t keep count. We even made a game out of vacuuming the house. But my favorite game is when we play hide and seek. Clara hides and after Bubba counts to three, he goes and searches for her. It’s not too hard to find Clara. Before I even really begin looking she pops up with the biggest and brightest smile and says, “Here I am!” Here I am. That precious little girl will never know how happy it makes my heart to hear someone named Clara saying, “Here I am”. It brings back the most wonderful memories for me.

I can only imagine how God’s heart stirs when his children rise up and say, “Here I am.” Whether it is to be an officer or to be an usher, to make a casserole of swiss chicken or to welcome refugees from Syria, to care for the heaters and coolers or to teach the children, God loves to hear his children say, “Here I am.” With those three words, “Here I am” echoing in our ears, let us begin the New Year with a little poem that prepares us all to be at the ready when we hear God’s call.

We know when Sam said here I am, it wasn’t a case of some bad green eggs and ham.

It wasn’t ham or spam or any other scam that made the boy say, “Here I am.”  
The call to that boy came from the God with a mighty name,  
Immortal, eternal, and for everlasting the same.

This God called a people to be his own

And promised he would never leave them alone.

This God entered the world as a baby born in a lowly stable

This God is here with us now, meeting us anew in the gifts on this table.

The bread and the cup are symbols of God's salvation

The life of Jesus, bringing healing to every nation.

Take, eat, and remember too

This is my Body and precious blood shed for you, shed for you, shed for you...and you...and you.

So in the days ahead when we feel a jab in our side

Let us not quiver or quake or try to hide

Let us respond with faith and sit up straight

Never pausing to doubt, or deny, or hesitate

When God calls us by name may we be quick to reply,

Here I am, Lord. Is it I?

Here I am Lord, trusting and true,

May 2022 be a year that I live for you.

Here we are Lord, trusting and true,

May 2022 be a year we live for you.

Here we are Lord, owing all we have to your Beloved Son,

May your kingdom come and your will be done.