

## **Sermons @ Trinity**

*January 21, 2009*

*A whisper with your name on it*

*The Rev. R. Cameron Miller*

Okay,  
if you haven't done it already,  
I want you to mentally put down your "To Do" list  
and put away your "Let's get it over" antsy-ness  
and take a deep breath.  
Even close your eyes if might be so bold,  
and just make the effort  
to arrive in this moment –  
here and now, and...*listen*.

It is so rarely done,  
and after all,  
what else is there to do right now,  
right here,  
except be present and hear the whispers within?  
So,  
if you haven't already,  
just stop and listen...

Shhhh...somewhere floating around in here  
in this sanctuary,  
in your pew,  
in this moment --

is an invitation being whispered to you...

As quietly as a butterfly's wing ripples the air,  
so is a whisper landing within this moment,  
spoken to you.

The whisper is an invitation;  
it is a request;  
from God to *go* somewhere you have needed to go; or,  
*move* in a direction you have been nudged; or,  
*become* something you have been afraid to be; or,  
*love* someone you have not loved well enough; or,  
*know* something you have not wanted to know; or,  
*do* something you have left undone; or,  
*hope* something you have not found the courage to hope.  
*So Listen...*

that is why we came here after all,  
even if we didn't really recognize it along the way.  
You and I came to a place like this  
to receive something  
we can't quite hear  
in the usual and normal chambers of our lives.  
We know it is there in those places,  
in every place we go,  
but we just can't quite hear well-enough  
in so many of the more cluttered moments we live.

*So listen* now.  
In the music,  
the words of the liturgy,  
maybe even in the words I will offer now;

if we listen attentively to the silence,  
to the noise of our thoughts,  
or even glimpse it in the posture of the person across the way...  
there is something coming to you  
as quietly as a gossamer-winged insect  
lands on honeysuckle.

Listen. Watch. Notice.  
Open. See. Know.

Let's listen first to Samuel.

If all we know about the call of Samuel  
is this little selection we just heard  
then it might seem like a nice little visit  
by God to a boy  
– sort of like Jimminy Cricket to Pinocchio.

But the call of Samuel  
begins the overthrow of a dynasty  
that has pretty much run the show for years;  
a dynasty that, as so many dynasties do,  
had thoroughly succumbed to the lure of  
materialism, greed, and the defiance  
of God's best dreams for creation.

In the story,  
the dynasty that governed  
the young Hebrew tribal society  
had to be replaced.  
So God gives a shout out to Samuel –  
at night  
in that state between wakefulness and slumber  
when we often hear things  
that we usually bat away as if a screaming mosquito.

*But then* Samuel listen's...

*and then* responds...

*And then*, Samuel finds himself the instrument of subversion,  
he finds himself a tool of subversion against the state...subversion against  
the king.

So the first thing we might hear in this story,  
if we are listening deeply enough,  
is that while God may whisper to us like a butterfly kissing a flower,  
the consequence of responding to God  
may not be quite so peaceful.

Take our friend, Sare Gordy.  
She wanted to come back to Western New York  
when she graduated from seminary,  
but I bet that when you thought about  
becoming a priest  
you never, in your wildest dreams,  
imagined she would start out at Trinity Church...  
or that the experience would undermine so much of what you learned in  
seminary.

And I bet she never imagined  
that she would become the vicar  
of the congregation in the very building  
where she worshipped as a child,  
and where,  
because of the extreme conservatism of the clergy  
and its congregation,  
she could not serve as an acolyte  
because only boys could do that.

I bet that Barack Obama never,  
in his wildest dreams,  
8 year old living in Indonesia,  
imagined himself in the Oval Office.

I bet that if you think about the course of your life,  
you are not living along the path  
that you would have predicted for yourself,  
and that even if you are –  
because some people pick a path  
and ride it hard until it's tamed –  
that you have been taken along detours  
that utterly changed you in some way.

Some of those detours may well have been a response  
to an invitation  
coming to you from a source outside yourself –  
or should I say,  
from a source that is deep

and at the very center of yourself.  
An invitation you may have heard  
and responded to  
or even one that you did not hear  
but stumbled onto and  
which somehow you made the best of.

Now you see,  
in our rational, prove-it-to-me mind,  
the idea that God evokes a direction for our lives;  
that God even knows us personally,  
let alone *by name*;  
is ludicrous.

In our rational mind,  
the idea that God could have anything to do with  
Barack Obama's direction in life,  
and even with what is about to happen on Tuesday,  
or that God would have anything to do  
with the chastening of the United States  
and so-called Free Market Capitalism,  
is ludicrous.

The idea that God would call a boy named Samuel  
to bring down a king is ludicrous.  
Or that God would chose a boy named David  
to *become* a king, is ludicrous.  
Or that God would inspire the movement of history  
so that the King of Persia  
would step in and save the exiled Hebrews  
so they could go home from Babylon, is ludicrous.  
Or that God would inspire  
mystical and erotic love songs and poetry  
in a woman named Julian, is ludicrous.  
Or that God could power and empower  
a shrunken old woman named Theresa,  
to stand with the most abandoned and abused people of the world,

even though she become deaf to the presence of holiness in her own life,  
is ludicrous.

Or the notion that God would ride upon the life  
of a Baptist minister named King,  
and upon the balance of his life  
finally turn the course of a 400 year history of oppression and  
degradation,  
is ludicrous.

*But listen...*

the smallest,  
most infinitesimal  
and, at the time, seemingly insignificant events  
have radically altered history –  
Natural history and human history.  
The most profound scientific achievements  
leap from accidental discovery.  
The most awesome and even frightening environmental alterations  
hinge upon decimal points of change in the atmosphere.

Your life and mine  
have been completely and totally altered  
by random encounters with people  
and unplanned experiences,  
and we have been changed  
in ways too profound to articulate  
by things we never even noticed at the time.

*Listen...*

There is no way to prove to you  
that God is afoot in the world,  
in history,  
even in your very life.  
I wouldn't bother trying.

But what I will say is: *have some humility.*

I mean, really;  
what we know  
and can know

after a million and a half years of our species' evolution,  
can fill a thimble in presence of the Cosmos.  
Let's just have a little humility  
about what is possible,  
and what we might *hear*  
were we to listen just a little bit more.

When I say,  
"*Listen...*"  
perhaps that resonates with you in some way,  
because few of us take the time to listen to our lives.  
We are so busy.  
There are so many needs and demands.  
We have so many choices.  
Listening takes time  
and we just don't seem to have much time...  
Even those who are retired seem so busy.  
Even our children,  
well before they start school,  
seem so busy.  
We just don't have time,  
so when I suggest that we "Listen"  
we intuitively know that means "Stopping."  
We have to *pause* to listen,  
and that sounds great –  
like a drink when we are thirsty.

But you and I both know that  
*there is a reason*  
we do not stop to listen.  
There is a very good reason why we do not pause.

As good as "Listening"  
sounds right now,  
and as wonderful as a pause might feel right now,  
we know why we don't...why we won't.

If we stop to listen  
what we will hear is *more*  
than the one or two voices we would chose to hear.

If we stop to listen we will begin to hear  
*all* the voices within us,  
and even all the voice around us  
that we now turn off, deflect, or reject.

When first we pause,  
take a deep breath and stop, we will greet the quiet.  
It is a blessing,  
a peaceful respite.  
But then they creep in, one or two at a time.

For a moment we can focus on the one we want  
to listen to and the one we want to hear.  
But before long  
we will find ourselves distracted,  
and suddenly captured by the sound of a voice  
we don't feel comfortable with or that we do not want to hear.  
Listening, pausing to listen,  
means hearing the ache in our heart  
and the pain in our bones.  
Listening,  
stopping to notice,  
means hearing a lonely inner plea for greater intimacy  
as well as the whisper of our fears  
about trusting others.

Listening,  
stopping to hear,  
means understanding the inner voices of our many  
needs and desires  
in all their different languages.

Listening, pausing for the moment,  
means thinning our calluses to hear the excruciating pain and needs of  
those around us.  
Oh, right,  
that's why we don't pause more often.  
Now we remember:  
if we stop  
then eventually we will catch up with ourselves

and notice what we have heard,  
and apprehend what we have seen,  
and be challenged by what we have deflected.

Listening,  
pausing to hear  
*all of those voices*,  
requires deep courage  
and it requires a well of trust in ourselves,  
even in God, and in one another.

But here is the problem.  
And by the way,  
I am going to leave it with the statement of the problem rather than a  
how-to book,  
because I believe that over half the battle  
is clearly understanding and clearly describing the problem.  
It comes down to this:  
if we continue to tune out all those voices  
we do not want to hear –  
especially the most painful ones –  
then God's *still small voice*  
is unavailable to us as well.

In fact,  
we won't even be able to hear  
the most important voices  
that have only to do with ourselves,  
let alone God and others.

As our friend Marielle Murphy was saying last week  
at her presentation about Solidarity after lunch,  
*Solidarity* with others,  
instead of a paternalistic do-gooderism  
where we "take care" of those on the margins  
but never bother to *know* them  
or *stand with them* in our common humanity,  
requires that we be able to be uncomfortable.

Solidarity requires that we be able listen and hear

even when we cannot *do* anything,  
or *fix* anything, or *change* anything.

The same can be said for listening to ourselves.  
To stand with,  
and be in solidarity with ourselves,  
we must be able *to be present* to the pain of our lives,  
and the compassion we feel  
for the pain in other's lives,  
even though we cannot change it  
or fix it  
or make it all better at the moment.  
We must *be present* and *listen*  
to the voices of our own pain.

And if we do,  
and when we do,  
eventually,  
in the good and the bad,  
in the joyful and the painful,  
in the scared and in the brave voices within ourselves,  
we will begin to hear  
the whisper of the one who knows us by name.

*So listen...*  
Take some time,  
and pause,  
and get ready to be uncomfortable  
when you listen to *all* the voices  
within and around you.

*Listen...*  
There will be,  
there already is,  
a whisper with your name on it.

Amen.

