

**October 23<sup>rd</sup> 2022,  
A Sunday Service for Summerland United Church  
Student Minister Anne Ellis – Presiding**

**THEME CONVERSATION:**

Well, this is my first day here. We just moved to Summerland last week. Before we moved I was living in Africa for a month at an orphan school and before that, I was in Halifax for 6 weeks for school, at the Atlantic School of Theology. My husband and son are still in Vancouver for another couple of months because of their jobs, but they'll move up here in December.

So, for the last few months, my life has been a bit of a whirlwind, a bit topsy-turvy, rather scattered, and full of change.

I'll admit that some of these changes have been scary. They've been good things, changes that I've been looking forward to and wanted to happen – but that doesn't change the fact that they're also scary.

And if you want to know a secret, I'll tell you, for my first Sunday here – I brought my stuffy. This is: Red Sock Man

It's not the most creative name, because he's made from a red sock. But he's very special. When I was little, my mom was part of a craft group that met at Mt. Seymour United Church. I would go with her because I wasn't in school yet or daycare. One day, one of the women who was a part of this group gave me this stuffy. I remember her being as tall as the trees outside and I was very shy, so having attention placed on me made me nervous. But she gave me this doll and I loved it. I've kept it all these years because it always reminds me of how safe and comfortable I felt at church surrounded by people and God who loved me.

The very first time I preached at Mt. Seymour I had red sock man with me and Fay, the woman who gave him to me was there as well. He helped me to be brave and preach for the very first time and remember that God is always present.

Maybe people are thinking I'm too old to have a comfort stuffy, that maybe as an adult I shouldn't be afraid or nervous. But, the thing is, as much as I'm over the moon excited to be here and starting this new job, I am afraid and I am nervous and that's ok.

Because I have my stuffy which helps me to be brave. This stuffy, because of XX also reminds me that God is present and with me during fearful times, which also helps me to be brave.

So I wonder, what helps you be brave?

I wonder if there are times you've been afraid to do something, but needed to be brave and do it anyway?

I wonder if there have been times when remembering God has helped you?

**SCRIPTURE READING**    1 Samuel 3: 1-10

**REFLECTION:**

So, hi. I'm Anne and I'm new here. I thought that today it would be good for us to get to know each other a little better. So I decided to reflect on this passage from Samuel because it is my 'call story.

You may not know this, but usually, ministers will have a special connection to one of the many call stories in the bible. It might be to Moses or one of the other prophets, sometimes it is the story of Saul becoming Paul or a story of one of the disciples. For me it's Samuel.

It's Samuel because like Samuel it took me a long time to realize I was being called to ministry. In fact, I denied it for quite a long time, close to 10 years in fact, because *who me? Me? Really?* Like Samuel, I heard a voice, but I was convinced it was anything other than God and if it was God, it couldn't possibly be a call to ministry. I'm not a minister type, although I'm not too sure just what a minister type is – so that argument didn't hold a lot of water.

Mostly I think I denied the call because I was scared. There came a time when I did realize what I was being called to and by who – but I was afraid, so I pretended it was something else.

And maybe Samuel did too. The passage says that the voice of God was not much heard in those days, so we assume Samuel didn't know who was talking to him and assumed it was Eli.

But we don't know that for sure. It's possible, at least I think so, that Samuel *did* know it was God's voice and just really didn't want to hear the call. It scared him.

The voice of God is not much heard these days either and talking about *'being called by God'* can get some odd looks in many circles. We live in a pretty secular world. For me, my faith has always been quite personal. Not something I talked about much to anyone or have ever been showy about.

So I can understand Samuel choosing to pretend he doesn't recognize God calling him. and it taking multiple repetitions for Samuel to listen.

And that's the thing about God. God is ridiculously patient. There are very few call stories in scripture where the person being called accepts right away or exclaims – *it's about time God! I've been waiting for you!*

Most stories involve the person saying – *not me. I'm too young, I'm too old, I'm this, I'm that, not me, you must mean someone else...* Jonah runs away and gets swallowed by a whale to avoid listening to God's call.

Yet, God remains patient and keeps on calling until each person realizes that even with all their flaws, faults, and self-confidence issues – or maybe *because of* their flaws, faults, self-confidence issues – God has called them to action.

I actually have two call stories. Samuel is my story for being called to work for the church. Even after I accepted that call, I was reluctant to listen to the call to be an ordained minister – see reasons listed above.

My second call story comes from Matthew. I came to this story in December 2018. It was advent and I was participating in a Spiritual Practice called "Who are you in the Nativity?" We were invited to sit in front of a Nativity and imagine who we felt connected to.

Were we Mary, ready to bring forth something new?

Were we the shepherds, ready to share the good news?

Were we the donkey, carrying a heavy load?

Were we the innkeeper just trying to make it all fit?

I'm usually the innkeeper. But on this particular day, I kept coming back to Joseph. Joseph, the man who is going to 'quietly put aside his bride to be because she was pregnant, and he's not the dad.'

Really? Joseph? I've never really liked him if I'm going to be completely honest. He's not the nicest of guys.

But, as I sat there thinking about it. I remembered Samuel as well. Maybe Samuel knew it was God and was afraid. So, maybe Joseph heard God call him and was afraid. Maybe he said - *this isn't the life I signed up for. I wanted a quiet life with my family and now you're saying I'm going to do this? No this is too big, too huge, I can't do it.*

And maybe, just maybe, the angel came to Joseph and along with saying "don't be afraid" the angel said "I know you're afraid, but be brave and do it anyway, God is with you."

And maybe, just maybe knowing that Joseph was able to say – ok.

And as I sat there, saying to myself – this isn't what I signed up for. I want a quiet life with my husband and my child. I don't want this big huge thing you're asking me to do. I also found myself saying, well if Joseph can say ok to his big call, maybe I can say ok to mine.

And I said ok. Ok, I want to be ordained and ok, I will do this.

Me coming here is part of that. I have a couple more years of school and I have learning to do before I can be ordained. This community of faith is also answering a call by hiring me. (for which I am grateful)

So here we are. All of us called to be together for the next 2 years (at min). *What does this mean? What are we being called together to do? Create? Be?*

I'm not expecting an answer to these questions right now. But it's something for all of us to think about over the next while.

--pause--

Each of us have a call. It might not be as big as parenting the son of god, or being a minister. But we are called to come here on a Sunday morning, to be a part of this community – and there's other ways we are called as well.

So what is your call?

Do you know or do you want to avoid knowing?

Have you always known or have you never given it a thought until this moment?

Again, not questions to answer right now. But I do want to invite each one of us, me included to think about it, to ponder it. Summerland UC has been through a lot in the last few years. Covid, part time ministers and other big life events I'm sure. Now, that we're sort of on the other side of Covid, perhaps it's time to think about not only what we're called to as individuals, but what we're called too as a community? Who are we called to be?

One of my professors at school posed the question in a practical theology class: What is God calling your community to do that only your community is suited to do.

A big question. A comfort stuffy level question. Joseph was called to something big, and the angel said, don't be afraid. God is with you. Mary will give birth to a son, and call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). So as we ponder these questions we can remember – God is with us.

When we hear our own call, we can remember Samuel who, when he hear his call, (eventually) responded, Here I am. Speak, your servant is listening.

May we do the same, amen