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"We Shall Overcome - A Difficult Decision"

January 15, 2012

1 Samuel 3:1-10, (11-20) John 1:43-51

How do you think you'd feel if you were Samuel? Well, after the third time, you'd probably think that old Eli had surely lost his mind! But Samuel listened to Eli, his mentor and friend, and then Samuel recognized that it was God who was calling him. He began to hear in a new way...but he didn't really like what God was saying to him.

He sure didn't want to tell Eli what God said...for it involved Eli and Eli's future...and the outlook wasn't so good. Apparently Eli's sons were speaking against God and Eli didn't stop them.

Now I feel for Eli, because I know from experience just how hard it is to convince one's children that what they do or how they act is wrong...at least by my standards. It's even harder sometimes to convince them that they are acting against God's standards.

When children grow up, they sometimes think they know better than their parents. Do we, God's children, think we know better than God? Hmmmm, good question? Each of us has our own answer to that.

Eli, in his wisdom, pushed Samuel to tell the truth...no matter what. So Samuel overcame his fears and shared God's distressful news with Eli who was willing to accept Samuel's words, because he knew they came from God.

It wasn't easy for Samuel to share God's message with Eli. He loved Eli and he didn't want him to be hurt. Samuel was very young and likely feared that there would be repercussions if he told Eli the truth. Fear of repercussion often holds us back...after all who likes conflict?

But Samuel trusted God and took a chance. Eli's love and his faith in God helped him to overcome his anger and disappointment and accept Samuel's words.

Our reading from John 1 speaks of the calling of Philip and Nathanael. It is a story about overcoming prejudice, biases and conceit. This passage makes it sound rather easy, but we know that prejudices and things that cause us to flinch at another human beings presence are difficult to overcome. Sometimes the things that cause us to build walls between us and another person have been ingrained in our being from a very young age. They have been taught to us by what we thought were reliable sources but now we hear another voice telling us that we must love and accept those who are different. We are being called to overcome our prejudices and the voices that tell us that "different" is bad...or wrong.

Today's passages are about "call," and how that call is answered. In the Bible, "call" means commissioned by God to do God's work. And what is God's work...simply... "to seek justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with our God." The challenge today is to think about how we do that.

We have to be prepared to overcome many things in order to answer God's call. As we already heard, we are called to overcome fear, prejudice, conceit, voices from the past that contradict what we "know" in our hearts to be God's will; we are called to overcome misplaced anger and disappointment. We are called to overcome injustice, greed, selfishness and unfairness. Sometimes we are even called to overcome our own longings and need for love in order to love others unconditionally as God does. Sometimes we have to overcome our own need to be heard in order to really hear someone else...to overcome our own need for comfort so as to comfort another person. We are called to give up feeling sorry for ourselves so as to respond to another's needs.

We are called...commissioned by God to do God's work. It's a tall order...isn't it? When I was

growing up in the 60's, the song, "We Shall Overcome," was very popular. I came to love that song...it spoke to me...not in the way it was meant to, I suppose, and yet it lifted my soul. I was dealing with a lot of hurt in my own life at the time and so what I heard was that those hurts and challenges would one day be overcome and I would be able to move beyond them to something new and something better.

It was in 1963 that Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his, "I Have a Dream" speech in which he called for racial equality and an end to discrimination. "As a child, ML (as he was called) played with a couple of white boys, until their mother said they couldn't play with ML any longer. That event was considered pivotal in King's spiritual development, and in his sense of call to ministry and to proclaiming an end to racism and injustice."

Today, as we celebrate the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr., not just as a great American hero, but also as a Christian simply living out his profound faith, we think about the many things in this world and in our own lives that we are being called to overcome. Please join me in the Martin Luther King Jr. litany. (insert in bulletin). You will note that the congregation sings, "We Shall Overcome..."

All: *(sing)* **We shall overcome...**

One: Just as God called the child Samuel, God also called the child Martin Luther King.

Two: And, like Samuel, Martin Luther King said, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."

One: He saw things around him that needed changing:

Two: People being treated unfairly,

One: People being judged by the color of their skin,

Two: People hurting one another,

One: People going hungry.

Two: And Martin Luther King proclaimed the gospel:

All: *(sing)* **We shall overcome...**

One: Martin believed that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Two: If people are doing things wrong in one place, it affects all of us.

One: So all of us must answer God's call to seek justice.

Two: All of us must say "No!" to things that are wrong,

One: "No!" to unfairness,

Two: "No!" to greed that makes others go hungry,

One: "No!" to judging people by what they look like, rather than who they are inside.

Two: Like Martin Luther King, let us proclaim the gospel:

All: *(sing)* **We shall overcome...**

One: Once, Martin Luther King stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, and told the world about his dream,

Two: And the world stopped and listened.

One: He dreamed of a time when all people

Two: Black and white, young and old, men and women, boys and girls,

One: Would be free, just as God said they should be.

Two: Like Martin Luther King, let us work to make that dream real.

All: *(sing)* **We shall overcome...**

- from The Whole People of God - Week 1 - Jan. 15/2012

God help, us to overcome, in order to love and feel whole. Amen.