

The Answer is Found in 3 Words

John 1:43-51 Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael
Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18 God has searched and known me
1 Samuel 3:1-20 God calls Samuel

(This was a dramatic reflection spoken from the pews with 2 adults who were statues up front. The statues, one representing Mary the mother of Jesus and the other representing Samuel changed positions 3 times. They began in a seated turned out position for the portion Am I Here? They then changed positions to being seated and looking directly out at the congregation for the words, I AM HERE. For the final section they stood up on the pillars facing the congregation for the words HERE I AM!)

Am I here? Am I here? That's a good question. What is this feeling? I don't know why I came. I've done this a few times (coming to church), but does it really matter? What's the point? I come. I sit. I'm not worthy to be here. I've done so many stupid things this week.

Why? I mean, I'm not like Mary, who's sitting up there, called by God. I'm not Samuel. I haven't heard God say 'Karen, Karen'.

No, I can't be here.

(Karen left the sanctuary and after a moment of silence she returned in a different aisle this time)

God said, 'I know you. I know you by your name. I have searched you and no matter where you try and hide, I will be there.' And it draws me in and it makes me want to say 'Alright. I am here. I'm...here.'

(The statues move to the second position)

I guess that means I had better listen. I don't know what I'm listening for. I don't know what God's voice sounds like. I need help. Mary had an angel appear to her to tell her what was going on. Samuel had Eli. It was Eli who reminded Samuel after three times that it was actually the voice of God speaking to him. Three times. An angel appeared to Mary – I don't know about you but I wouldn't have believed that. But she listened.

Where do I turn for that knowledge, to know that God called me? Because in the psalm it says, 'no matter where you go, no matter what road you take, God is there with you in that moment.'

I think I know. The answer to how I am going to figure out what message God is giving me is rest in people like Robert here. (*Karen has sat down in a pew beside a member of the congregation*). The people sitting in front of me, the words that the choir sings. The message is everywhere around me. It isn't until I say 'Here I am' and I start listening that things start to change.

(The statues change to the final position)

Here I Am. Three simple words. Said in different orders, they have very different meaning. I'm sure there are times when it does feel like maybe in body you are here, but are you here?

We go to people's houses and say 'I'm here'. But are we truly there in that moment? When you came through those doors today – made the decision to walk through those doors today – which can be very difficult – were you ready to take a step forward to say 'Here I am, Lord, Your servant is listening. I trust you and you can do with my life what you will.

Here I Am. There are so many things that keep us from saying those three little words – guilt, exhaustion, distractions of life, sickness. The thing is, God is there, reaching out, saying 'I am here with you'. Reaching out to the youngest, to the oldest, to everyone in this space.

God knows everything we think, everything we feel, everything we desire, hope and dream. God has known us since we were conceived, yet we often flee from God's presence, but I believe that our scriptures today are calling us to embrace our faith. We are being called to open our hearts to God no matter where we are on our faith journey, whether we're like Samuel, who God is speaking to directly, or Eli who has kind of lost that loving feeling, lost the sense of presence in his life, lost the feeling that God was in his midst, in the temple where he worked.

Maybe we were like Nathaniel who had been longing for something more, but didn't believe that it would happen, until one day the Son of God saw right through him, and knew the depths of his heart.

Today we are each being called to open the doors of our heart to God and to one another. Joyce Rupp writes, "When I open the door of my heart to God, I do more than simply extend the smile of recognition, or a nod of welcome. I open myself to grow and change in ways that I may never dream likely. I risk. I risk being spiritually transformed into a person whose life continually manifests goodness."¹

Each of us is dealing with so many pieces of pain in our life and they're all different. Each of us has places in our life that need healing. Our scriptures today remind us that God's hand is there, holding us and inviting us to walk with God. We are not alone.

¹ Joyce Rupp, *Open the Door; A journey to the True Self*, (Notre Dame, Indiana; Sorin Books, 2008) p.7.

There is a song by Avril Lavigne that says 'You're not alone. Together we stand. I'll be by your side. You know I'll take your hand. When it gets cold and it feels like the end, there's no place to go, no, I won't give in. No, I won't give in. Keep holding on, 'cause you know we'll make it through. Just stay strong, 'cause you know I'm here for you. There's nothing you can say, there's nothing you can do. There's no other way when it comes to the truth. Just keep holding on.'

We are being asked to make a commitment, a commitment to God. It's a new year, a new opportunity and we need to renew our faith in God over and over again.

I am going to teach you some movements with the words Here I Am as a way of committing yourselves to being truly present to God today.

I'll show you the movements. It begins here with your hands in a prayerful manner in front of you. Now put our hands over our hearts. Now put your hands up in the air wide open for we are opening ourselves to God and now we place our hands on our laps, we ground ourselves. With each movement we repeat one word of the phrase Here. I. Am. Here. I. Am. Here. I. Am. Here. I. Am.

You have arrived and God is very pleased. So I hope that you will use one another to figure out what message God has for you, how God has called you to live out your faith in this Church, this community and in the world. Amen.