

This week promises to be a significant time in our nation. The inauguration of a new President and Vice President has the potential of real change. And tomorrow's celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr. brings our attention to the unfinished work of facing and overcoming the racism in our country's fabric. For believers it is a time to begin again and recognize what God asks of us, particularly as followers of Jesus Christ and the mission to build the kingdom of God in our midst.

Our scriptures today also call us to begin again, to pay more attention to how much we are really present to God and allow God to be present to us. Our first reading is the story of the call of the boy, Samuel, in the temple. Three times God calls to him but he does not recognize that it is God who is calling. He needs the discernment of the elder, Eli, to pay attention to God's call.

Samuel finally responds, "Here I am." In Hebrew this is hineni. This word, hineni, appears often in the scriptures as a response to God's call. For instance, with Abraham. It means more than just "I'm here," but it also means I am present to you and know you are present to me. Husbands and wives might try responding to each other at times, Hineni.

Samuel is instructed to say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." Some years ago, Fulton Sheen spoke on this text and commented that, so often, we tend rather to say, "Listen, Lord, your servant is speaking." We are too busy with our lives to be present to God and we don't know how to listen. Perhaps we need to practice being really present to each other, to those around us, and learn to listen better.

The gospel of today is one of those masterful summaries and insights of John in his fourth gospel. In this gospel Jesus is successively called "lamb of God," "Rabbi," "the Messiah" translated as Christ. The next passage in the gospel will identify Jesus as Son of God, the one of whom Moses and the prophets wrote, King of Israel, and Son of Man.

The two disciples following Jesus are being drawn into the presence of the Christ. First directed to him by the words of John the Baptist, they must now make a personal encounter with Jesus.

The dialogue is marvelous. Jesus senses them following and turns around and speaks the first words we hear from him in this fourth gospel, “What are you looking for?” This is a probing question that each one of us has to answer. What are we looking for? What is the goal of our lives? Small wonder that many of us don’t really know what we are looking for.

Neither did the disciples know what they were looking for. They stammer, look for words, don’t know how to respond and so change the subject. “Where are you staying?” they ask. For John the verb, stay (menein) is the same word that Jesus will use later to describe where he abides – the Father in me and I in him. Who, really, are you? What is the source of your strength, your magnetism, the power we feel coming from you.

Jesus’ reply to their question is also loaded. “Come and you will see.” Come to know me. Come and enter a relationship with me, an intimate, personal, life-giving relationship. Your life will be changed. Just as Simon, son of John, will now be called Cephas, which is translated Peter. Peter is being called to a new beginning. We know how this is going to develop.

Hineni. Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. What are you looking for? Where are you staying? Come and you will see. Are our hearts moved by these stories of new beginnings? Can we hear the Lord speaking our name? Will we reply?

The saintly Jesuit, Pedro Arrupe, said that the essence of our human call is to fall in love with God. He writes, “What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the mornings, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, what you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.”

God calls each of us by name. We are called to be open, to serve as God calls us to serve. We begin by listening and then to grow.

What do you want? Where do you live? Come and see.
In that brief exchange lies the story of our Christian lives.

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