**Gospel**: John 1:43-51

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” 44Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” 46Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” 47When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” 48Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” 49Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” 50Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” 51And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

**Message**: He’s Just Jesus

I’m not sure about this ear-tingling God speaks of. At this point in my life, my ear activities include low-grade tinnitus and occasionally the louder ringing when, according to the old wives’ tale, someone is talking about you. Tingling occurs, for me, as an Adrenalin rush during an exercise high or when I take the lid off the garbage can and a snake looking up at me. Given time, that tingling will subside as the Adrenalin dissipates.

Perhaps God’s ear-tingling is more metaphoric than physical. God **is** doing something new, and for any who hear of this good news, they will be so delighted and excited that their ears may just tingle, at the very least a shiver along the spine. Have you ever experienced a series of minor set-backs and at the same time they all rather miraculously are resolved with perfect timing? You get this mental niggle or tingle that God is working in all this. A facet of all this is that God **will** have you use this experience for God’s glory. And when this happens, **Go**! **Tell it**, on a mountain or elsewhere. People can’t hear of God or the workings of God unless YOU speak the words and actions of God. Make someone’s ears tingle!

A very young Samuel, whose very ordinary mother had gratefully dedicated him to God’s service before he was born, was in on one of those God moments. Eli’s eyes may have been dim, but his spiritual visual acuity at that point was not. Confronted with his failure to raise his sons to be willing to serve God faithfully, he recognized that an end was near; his family would no longer be part of the priestly line, and that young Samuel had been chosen by God for a change of course in the tradition of spiritual leadership. We all have our moments when we fail—our self and God. As faithful believers, we must face our failures openly and candidly. God knows us inside and out and knew us even before all those atoms, particles and enzymes were coming together. Our open confession is cleansing allowing God an opening to refresh, renew, and restore. God was doing something new in the child, Samuel. As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him, and *all Israel knew he was a trustworthy prophet of God*. Their ears may have been tingling.

More than we realize, God initiates contact (just as with Samuel) and intervention with us. God’s call on one’s life is an act of spiritual intimacy, an act that should be cherished. Imagine someone whom you admire but are not on any of their lists let alone the A-List, calling you out of the blue and inviting you to dinner and to chat about a topic he/she wants your input on. How would you react to that? God calls us, and God wants us all to be on his A-List. God also wants our input. God’s call is indicative of the sacred worth of ALL humanity, not the exception, but the norm. More often, God comes to us in less than grand and showy ways; yet in retrospect, the elegance is in the subtlety.

There is a longing in God to be close and personal with **all** people. We can attend worship, but are we really present? We can baptize and participate in Holy Communion, but are we really living the intimacy of being in God’s presence fully aware of the urgency of God’s call on our life. Authentic encounters with God are not primarily meant to call us to mission. Intimacy with God, encounters with God are meant to transform; you become a new person seeing life differently, behaving differently, caring differently, whether your ears tingle or not.

God so dearly wants to be close to us, to be intimate with us, a trusted being with us, for us to know him, (probably not as well as God knows us) that he, again initiated the contact, coming to us, living among us as one of us—in Jesus (and I love this phrase) *in whom all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.* Jesus, this child from Nazareth grew in all the normal Nazareth culture—small town kid. Adult Jesus was fresh out of the Jordan and *decided* to go to Galilee. The word “decided” implies that, although intimate with God far more than the rest of us, he was still living in full humanity, genuine humanness, capable of making his own decisions. He was not compelled by the Holy Spirit, as he had been compelled to go into the Wilderness. Choice is inherent in relationship with God. At this point, to those who first encountered him, Jesus is just another ordinary human, from an insignificant village far from the sophistication of Jerusalem to other ordinary humans. Based on first impressions, we make erroneous assumptions about people based on where they are from and family ties. My brother and I were raised in a small town in central PA that during the glory days had been a lumber town on the West Branch of the Susquehanna River. Since then it’s residential with a few stores. My brother went on to do quite well in real estate banking. One of his colleagues said that driving back from some trip he saw the signs for Jersey Shore PA and made the side trip through town. “Gee, Tom, you turned out pretty good.”

At this point, back in Galilee, Jesus is just Jesus. He has done no miracles, healed no one, fed no crowds, raised no one from the dead, no confrontations with scribes, priests or Pharisees. He has not preached or taught in public. Jesus met up with Phillip and simply said after a conversation, “Come with me.” Phillip had found someone he wanted to hang out with. Phillip told Nathanael who made the typical remark based on Jesus’ humble background, less than prominent parentage. When encountering the Divine, it **is** possible to be oblivious to God’s presence. But not for Nathanael.

In a few words from Jesus, however, Nathanael experienced with overwhelming shock that this person of identifiable earthly origins, has elicited a response appropriate to God. Jesus awakens in us a sense of believing without the necessity of hard cold evidence or fact. There is an attractive power, according to Karl Barth, of a **preexisting** bond established by God’s incarnation in Jesus. Although we may feel that *all the fullness of God* may not dwell in each of us, it’s not that God doesn’t desire that. An encounter with Jesus is a potent force that propels and compels Phillip and Nathanael to be drawn into the sheer presence of the Christ. Our encounter with Jesus is more than an encounter with just Jesus; it is an encounter with the Divine. Jesus’ role is to reveal God—God, who is very pleased to dwell fully in him. Jesus has been with me for a very long time. When the weather is pleasant, it’s just Jesus and me having a cup of coffee on the front porch, getting ready for the day. It may seem like he’s just Jesus, but in those moments, Jesus is an invitation to an epiphany, to experience God, to believe without seeing, to be transformed into a new humanity, with or without your ears tingling. Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Absolutely. To God be the glory. Amen.

**Prayers of the People/the Lord’s Prayer**: Almighty God, shield of the oppressed, hear our prayers for the friendless and the lonely, the tempted and the unbelieving. Be merciful to those who suffer in body mind or spirit, to those who are in danger or distress, and who have suffered loss, Let your love surround the infirm and the aged. Be especially near to those who are passing through the valley of death. May they find eternal rest and light at evening time, through Christ our Lord who teaches us to pray, “Our Father . . .”

**Prayer of Thanksgiving**: God of all wisdom, how often we have been deaf to your voice speaking to our hearts, especially when we move in a world that needs it so desperately? Samuel’s story tells us “The word of the Lord was rare in those days” which resonates with the relevance of the evening news. As we bring our gifts to be dedicated this morning, we pray that you might open our ears and our hearts to hear where you call us to respond with obedience, so that we might do what you need to begin healing our world. In Christ we pray. Amen.

**Benediction**: Go from this place ready to listen for God’s voice and to follow the Spirit’s leading as we answer the call to build God’s beloved community of justice, peace and flourishing for all in our world.

**Old Testament**: 1 Samuel 3:1-11

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. 2At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; 3the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. 4Then the Lord called, “Samuel! Samuel!” and he said, “Here I am!” 5and ran to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” So he went and lay down. 6The Lord called again, “Samuel!” Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” 7Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. 8The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. 9Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. 10Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”11Then the Lord said to Samuel, “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle.

**New Testament**: 1 Corinthians 6:11-20

And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

12“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. 13“Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food,” and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. 15Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! 16Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, “The two shall be one flesh.” 17But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. 18Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. 19Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.