

Order of Celebration
Commemorating the Legacy Martin Luther King, Jr.
January 18, 2009

First Reading ~ 1 Samuel 3:1-20

Now young Samuel was in the service of God under Eli. In those days, the voice of God was rarely heard — visions were not widespread. One night, Eli, whose eyes had grown so weak that he could no longer see, was sleeping in his bed. The lamp of God had not gone out, and Samuel was sleeping in the Tent of Meeting, near the Ark of the Covenant.

Then God called to Samuel.

Samuel answered, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli saying, "You called. Here I am!"

Eli said, "I didn't call you. Now go back to sleep." He went back to sleep.

A second time, God called Samuel, and he got up and went to Eli.

"Here I am!" Samuel said, "You called me."

Eli repeated, "I did not call you. Go back to sleep."

At that time Samuel had not yet encountered God, and the word of God had not yet been revealed to him.

God called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up, went to Eli, and said once more, "Here I am. You called me."

Then Eli realized that God was calling the boy.

So he said to Samuel, "Go back and go to sleep, and if you are called, say, 'Speak, God, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went back to sleep.

And God called, "Samuel! Samuel!"

And Samuel replied, "Yes, God, I am listening."

Then God said to Samuel, "I am going to do things in Israel that will make the ears of all who hear about them ring. I am going to fulfill all the dreadful things I told Eli I would do against his family — from the beginning to the end. You are to tell Eli that I condemn his family forever because he knew of the blasphemies of his sons against God which he ignored. Therefore, I swear it to the house of Eli, neither sacrifice nor offering will ever expiate the guilt of the House of Eli."

Samuel lay down to rest till morning, when he opened the doors of the Tent of Meeting. He was afraid to tell Eli about the vision, but Eli called to Samuel, who answered, "Here I am."

"Samuel, come here, what did God say to you? Don't hide it from me. May God curse you if you conceal from me one word of what you were told."

Then Samuel told Eli everything, concealing nothing. Eli said, "God reigns. God will do what must be done."

As Samuel grew, God was with him. None of Samuel's words remained unfulfilled. From Dan to Beersheba, all Israel recognized that Samuel was a prophet of God.

Second Reading ~ from Martin Luther King, Jr.

Excerpts of his speech "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence"
delivered April 4, 1967 at Riverside Church in New York City.

The recent statement of your executive committee are the sentiments of my own heart and I found myself in full accord when I read its opening lines: "A time comes when silence is betrayal." That time has come for us ...

The truth of these words is beyond doubt but the mission to which they call us is a most difficult one. Even when pressed by the demands of inner truth, [people] do not easily assume the task of opposing their government's policy, especially in time of war. Nor does the human spirit move without great difficulty against all the apathy of conformist thought within one's own bosom and in the surrounding world. Moreover when the issues at hand seem as perplexed as they often do in the case of this dreadful conflict we are always on the verge of being mesmerized by uncertainty; but we must move on.

Some of us who have already begun to break the silence of the night have found that the calling to speak is often a vocation of agony, but we must speak. We must speak with all the humility that is appropriate to our limited vision, but we must speak. ...

... The words of the late John F. Kennedy come back to haunt us. Five years ago he said, "Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable."

Increasingly, by choice or by accident, this is the role our nation has taken — the role of those who make peaceful revolution impossible by refusing to give up the privileges and the pleasures that come from the immense profits of overseas investment.

I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a "thing-oriented" society to a "person-oriented" society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered.

Reflection:

"Tough Talk: Speaking Truth to Power"
Reverend Dr. Kharma Amos, Senior Pastor