

**This is January 17, 2021...the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany**

On behalf of the family of faith at Community United Church of Christ, Medford, WI,  
welcome to this time of worship!

“No matter who you are or where you are on your life’s journey, you are welcome here!”

**Call to Worship:** God called Noah to build an ark...and Noah answered: **Please respond, “Here I am, Lord.”**

God called Abraham to be father to a great nation...and Abraham answered: **Here I am, Lord.**

God called Moses to lead his people out of bondage and Moses answered: **Here I am, Lord.**  
God called Samuel and Isaiah and Jeremiah to prophesy...and they answered: **Here I am, Lord.**

God called Deborah to be a judge...and Deborah answered: **Here I am, Lord.**

God called David to be a King...and David answered: **Here I am, Lord.**

God called Mary to bear a child...and Mary answered: **Here I am, Lord.**

God called Peter, James and John, Simon, Andrew and Bartholomew, Matthew, Phillip and Thaddaeus

James the Less, Thomas and Judas Iscariot. He called these few to be his closest followers.

He called them to proclaim the gospel. When he called, they answered: **Here I am, Lord.**

God is still calling today. He calls each one of us to BE, to DO, to GO...and we answer: **Here I am, Lord.**

**Our Scripture today comes from the first book of Samuel 3:1-20 New International Version**

*The Lord Calls Samuel*

3 The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare;

there were not many visions. 2 One night, Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see,

was lying down in his usual place. 3 The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the [house](#) of the Lord, where the ark of God was.

4 Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, “Here I am.” 5 And he ran to Eli and said, “Here I am;

you called me.” But Eli said, “I did not call; go back and lie down.” So he went and lay down.

6 Again the Lord called, “Samuel!” And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.”

“My son,” Eli said, “I did not call; go back and lie down.”

7 Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.

8 A third time the Lord called, “Samuel!” And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.”

Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. 9 So Eli told Samuel, “Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

10 The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

11 And the Lord said to Samuel: “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. 12 At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. 13 For I told him that I would [judge](#) his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them. 14 Therefore I swore to the [house](#) of Eli, ‘The guilt of Eli’s [house](#) will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.’”

15 Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the [house](#) of the Lord. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, 16 but Eli called him and said, “Samuel, my son.” Samuel answered, “Here I am.”

17 “What was it he said to you?” Eli asked. “Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you.” 18 So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, “He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes.”

19 The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel’s words fall to the ground.

20 And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord.

**The hymn, “Take My Life and Let It Be” #466, will be used throughout the message today.**

**My message today is entitled, “Are We Ready to Listen?”**

**Please pray with me:** Good and Gracious God, we had high hopes for 2021, but, it didn’t “come in” easily. Didn’t we hear? Don’t we know? You are the everlasting God...and when you gave us a chance to start over, we sat back and couldn’t think of anything to change: **Lord, have mercy.** When you called to us find a way to help those who are struggling to survive, we turned away from the challenge: **Christ, have mercy.** When you hinted, when you invited, when you surrounded us with calls to love more fully, and follow you more faithfully, we held our tongues and wallowed in our own comfort and safety. **Lord, have mercy.** Let’s be silent now. Take a deep breath. let it out. We pray, with every breath we take, in the name of Jesus. Amen

**Verse 1:** Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee;  
take my hands and let them move at the impulse of thy love, at the impulse of thy love.

Friends, the call of God, like God’s own grace, is new every day. Let us go forward from this moment on,

with eyes and ears and hearts open to the work of God around us. After the events of the past week, are we ready to listen now...are we ready to be stronger and more courageous to create, along with God, a just world for all? I hope that you can say “Yes!” and along with Samuel, “Here I am, Lord.”

Today’s story of Samuel’s “calling” begins with these words: “In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.” Did you ever find yourself saying or thinking those words or these: “In these days, God seems to be silent.” When was the most recent time that you had an idea that God was trying to get your attention, or, might I say, “our collective attention”? Was it

when you first heard that there was a dangerous virus on its way? Or was it when the Capitol building was being breached?

Or, were you and I, like Eli and Samuel...sleeping or blinded to what was going on? After all, Eli was in the Temple! Did he sense God's presence so often that he missed it this time? Are we so exhausted that our minds and hearts and souls are dulled by God's presence...even here in our "church" outside of the walls? When Eli tells Samuel to listen again for the voice, it might be proof that Eli had heard that voice more than once and knew quite well that God is persistent. Samuel *hears* God's voice, but thinks that it is Eli calling. Samuel finally answers God's call and learns that he is about to help others to do the same.

These are the words of God to Samuel, as interpreted in The Message: "*Listen carefully. I'm getting ready to do something in Israel that is going to shake everyone up and get their attention.*"

These are the words of God to Samuel, as translated in the King James Version of the Bible: *And the Lord said to Samuel, "Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both **the ears of everyone that heareth it shall tingle.**"*

These are the words of Rev Donna Schaper, Senior Minister at Judson Memorial Church in NY: "*God is going to do a new thing, so large that it will make us tingle.*" Oh, by the way, did you pay attention after three times hearing these words?

When was the last time that you felt tingly when God spoke to you or when you felt that God had a hand

in what has unfolded in your life? Was it when you all of a sudden got the urge to fill donate food to a local food pantry? Was it when, staying at home and working at home allowed you to spend more time with your family? or was it when you got in touch with people you had not heard from in years? Was it when you realized that one of the best things that has happened this year was when the church buildings were closed to the public? Yes, you heard or read that right. For me, being the church outside the walls of the church building is what God is calling us to do and has been calling us and all of ancestors in faith to do for 2000 years! Tingly. Feel it now?

**Verse 2:** Take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for thee;

take my voice and let me sing always, only for my King, always, only for my King.

When was the last time that God got our attention amidst the tingle of fear? The fear in hearing about numerous black brothers and sisters being unjustly arrested and, some, violently killed. The fear that overcame us when it was discovered that there was a virus that would be nearly unstoppable. The fears associated with taking precautions: staying home, wearing masks, not touching anyone, staying distanced. The fear that a family member or you would get COVID and or pass away because of its complications.

Some of you have told me that you have prayed more this past year than ever in your lifetime. Don't stop now. Some of us have turned to meditation and reading the scriptures. Some have chosen to be volunteers distributing food to the needy. Some have found refuge and inspiration in online prayer groups and book studies. How have recent fears affected you? Are you just plain fearful? depressed? anxious? angry?

Not knowing which way to turn? Stare out the window at a snowy tree. Try to only think of that tree.

Then, ask yourself: What is God calling me to do right now? What came to your mind? Take another deep breath and let it out, then with all the courage you can muster up, say, “Here I am, Lord!”

Imagine a world where we can leave our doors unlocked and we are not suspicious of our neighbors. Imagine that we are able to gather together again in groups of people outside of our “bubbles.” Imagine that there is an in-person coffee hour twice a week. Imagine that the vaccine has been distributed to all who would have it. Imagine that we would be able to discern God’s intent for our church in the future.

Imagine that we would be able to “belong” to ourselves, our good-intentions realized, hoping, smiling, trusting, loving selves. Imagine offering forgiveness and being able to trust again. Imagine that we, like Samuel, would not even pause to think before saying, “Here I am Lord.” Jesus, the radical Rabbi, who brought a way of life to our ancestors in faith, offers new life, a new and better way and the same time-tested truths to each of us. Imagine good things and believe that they are on the way! Watch as God continues to create.

Are we ready to take at least a few minutes each day to listen for God’s prompting? Will we dare to be bold enough to follow Eli’s suggestion and say: **“Speak, for your servant is listening.”** Why not?

Now is the time...not more than ever before, but, now, this time is as good as ever before!  
As Paul wrote in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 6:2 Common [English](#) Bible  
*I listened to you at the right time, and I helped you on the day of salvation.  
Look, now is the right time! Look, now is the day of salvation!*

**Verse 3:** Take my lips and let them be filled with messages for thee;  
take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold, not a mite would I withhold.

How do we know that God is calling us? These are the words of Psalm 139:1-6 give us a clue:  
1 Lord, you have examined me. You know me. 2 You know when I sit down and when I stand up.

Even from far away, you comprehend my plans. 3 You study my traveling and resting.  
You are thoroughly familiar with all my ways.

4 There isn’t a word on my tongue, Lord, that you don’t already know completely.

5 You surround me—front and back. You put your hand on me. ~Common English

Bible

Just as your best friend knows you very well, so does God. Get ready to listen.

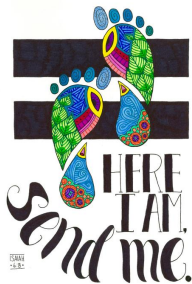
### Time for Prayer

**Let’s spend a few moments in silent prayer. Take a deep breath. And breath it out.**

(I found this the first part of the prayer, today in a daily devotional, d365.org)

Let us pray: “O Creator of the Cosmos, the one who formed all that was or is or will be, and is the same God who breathed breath into us, the one who knit us together, the one who knows us best, and the one who calls us...let us know this gift more deeply today,

*and share it as freely as we have received it: We are called and known.”*



We give you thanks, gracious God, for calling us to serve one another and to love one another as you have so extravagantly shown us how. We thank you for the call, every morning, each day and each year. You know the passage of our time very well. We give you thanks for all of your sons and daughters whom you have placed on our path in the journeys...the journeys of everyday life, the journeys

to faraway places, the journeys down to the lakeshore and to the office, to the banquet hall and the kitchen table, through the church doors and out into the wider "church" outside the brick walls. We give thanks

for the minutes and the hours that we have been able to spend in the company of good friends.

Loving God, already in the days ahead, help us to step closer to you during these difficult days, with the intent to care for each other as you would have us care. We lift our prayers to you now for those who are grieving and remembering loved ones who have passed away; for those who are struggling with mental illness; for all those suffering with the corona virus, those in quarantine, those in nursing homes and assisted living and all those we mention in our hearts now.

We lift our prayers for the medical community and the EMTs; the Police Departments and Firefighters and all who serve in public office. We lift our prayers for President Trump and Vice President Pence, for the President and Vice-President Elect. Lead them and guide them in the coming days. Let peace be known and shared as the Administration changes. We ask you to bring a change of heart to all those who seek to inflict harm on our brothers and sisters in all 50 States.

We lift our prayers now for those who are hurting, living with illness and waiting for the comfort of healing to come, we lift to you Rev. Dale and Jackie, Lily, Cindy and Jeff P, Shelly B, Cathy S, Kristin W, Wayne, Jenn, Rick and Teresa G, Eric E, Jeff P, Jamie H, Brian N, Mike K, Angie, Mike G-P, Matt L; We pray for the children in day care and in the schools and those taking online classes and all those who are taking part in the State testing.

Nudge us to a deeper commitment to keep ourselves, our loved ones and all those around us safe wherever we are. Give us the endurance to mask up and step away from each other for as long as it takes...

all the while, praying in the name of Jesus and in his words: **Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but, deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen**

**Verse 4:** Take my love, my God, I pour at thy feet its treasure [store](#);  
take myself and I will be ever, only, all for Thee, ever, only, all for thee.

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### **This is our time of intention and thanks**

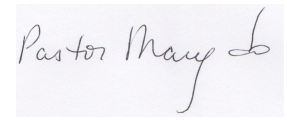
Let us turn our thoughts to what we will give for the support of church's ministries and for reaching out into the community as members and friends of this church. Know that no matter the size or the shape, each and every gift of time, talent and treasure will make a difference. Give as cheerful givers who are listening very closely for God's call to minister to one another.

Let us pray: In your extravagant generosity, O God, you sent us Jesus, in person. We offer all that we have: our worship, our talents, our time, our money and our lives in service to the kin-dom that Jesus came to proclaim. We dedicate the gifts that we have shared, mailed, dropped off or given electronically, in his name. Amen.

**Benediction:** This time of worship has come to an end, let our service continue.

Hear now the words of Rev. Traci Blackmon, Associate General Minister for Justice and Local Church Ministries, UCC: *In thee, O God, we place our trust. In thee, O God, we seek your peace. We pray, O God, to heal your land. Be with us, O God, we need your love. In thee, O God, we place our trust.*

**Go now, be alert for God's call and be safe,**

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pastor Mary Jo Laab".

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Visit our webpage: [uccmedford.org](http://uccmedford.org) Click on “Media” to watch the video recordings  
of recent Worship Services and this Service! **Pastor Mary Jo Laab**