

# St. Matthew's Church

## NEW YORK CITY

### **VOICES IN THE NIGHT**

**John 1:43-51**

**Second Sunday after Epiphany, January 18, 2009**

Voices in the night are constantly calling to us: voices of our troubled world, our confused society, our fragmented humanity. There are voices of our own pain, brokenness, disorientation, and voices of our own desires.

In this chorus of voices there is only discord, nor harmony. Each voice makes its claim on us. Each asserts the truth of its own sound. We wonder to which voice we should listen. We ask who is calling us. Is it the voice of truth, or the voice of falsehood? We hear some of the voices saying one thing; others, another thing. One calls us to look out for Number One. But another calls us to surrender our self-seeking for some cause, but one voice says this cause, the other voice says this cause.

We hear many of the televangelist assuring us that this world is on its last leg and that the return of Christ is near. Then we hear the ecologist asking us to save this planet Earth for the sake of our children and their children's children. We hear the pro-life voices and the pro-choice voice. The voices of the creationists and the evolutionists bombard our ears.

Where amid the voices in the night of our world is the truth? Where is the voice of God? Is there a voice of God to be heard in the midst of all these sounds?

We have known the people who choose to try to be nonreligious. They say that every church claims to have the truth, so there must be no truth to be had. They thus listen to no one.

**In our Old Testament reading**, the boy Samuel heard a voice. As Samuel lay sleeping, he hears a voice calling his name. "It must be Eli calling me," he thought to himself and jumped to his feet, wiping the sleep from his eyes he goes to Eli and ask, "Did you call me?" "No, my son, go back to sleep."

Trying to become comfortable again on his mat, Samuel once again sought the peace of sleep. And again he heard a voice calling his name. "Did you call me?" "No my son go back to sleep." This time Samuel found it hard to think of sleep, to relax, listening as he was for that voice to come again. And it did, and this time Samuel said to Eli, "Surely this time you called me?" "No, my son, I did not."

**Voices in the night!** Like Samuel, we hear the voices, but amid the voices in the night of our world is the truth? Where is the voice of God? Samuel heard the voice, not once but three times. Each time he thought was the priest Eli calling him. The wise, old Eli sensed that Samuel was hearing the call of another voice in the night. "Go, lie down, and if he calls again, you shall say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." When the voice came again, Samuel was able to respond to the call of God out of the darkness of the night.

The voice of God calls us too out of the night. Amid all the other voices is the voice of our Creator. Amid the assortment of human voices somewhere there is the distinctive sound of the one who calls us to trust and service. We may mistake that divine voice for just another human sound. We may confuse it with noises of the world or with the rumblings of our own emotions. But it is there nonetheless, a patient voice that keeps speaking our names, waiting for us to respond.

**Voices in the Night!** Yes, it is always a risk when we dare to believe that it is the voice of God speaking our name. In our Gospel lesson today from John, Nathanael doubted his friend's voice. Philip came with an invitation, "We have found the One for whom we have been waiting all our lives." "Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" What was Philip to do except, invite his friend to take a risk. "Come and See, come and see for yourself."

There is a voice in the night calling us to take a risk, to come and experience it for ourselves. How else will we ever know if it is truly the voice of God calling? How else, except to risk the venture of faith? How else, except to dare to believe that the loving God has spoken our name? How else, but to trust and serve?

There is a voice in the night of our world and our souls calling us today, and it is a call to trust, a call to serve. The voice asks us to come and see and

experience a renewed life of trust and service in the name of the One we call our Lord. It involves daring to take some chances. The voice invites us to see visions of what we might be and to follow those visions. There will be voices of caution, telling us to keep both feet on the ground and not fly. It is always hard to know which voice is the voice of that gracious, patient, calling God of ours. There is only one way to know and the only way we will ever know and that is to come and see. Let me encourage you to step out and experience a new trust, a new mission, a new serving.

**Voices in the Night! Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.** Not to many years ago he heard a voice and rose up from his mat to trust and serve. The voice asked him to trust that America could become a nation free of its racism, free of its prejudice, free of its need to oppress some for the benefit of others. The voice asked him to appeal to the conscience of America. That voice in the night asked Martin Luther King, to ignore the calls to violence from some of his own people. The way of nonviolence was the only route to justice. There were voices from the other side as well, voices that condemned his dream and smeared his integrity. African Americans were of an inferior race. They must accept an inferior place in society, dependent on the wisdom of the white majority.

Amid all of the voices in the night Dr. King dared to trust that it was the voice of God he heard. He dared to come and see. He answered; “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.” Our world has never been the same. And on Tuesday, January 20, 2009, America will witness and have its first African American President.

Is there hope that we might do the same? Is there hope that we might be able to hear God’s voice amid all of the noise of our world? Is there hope that we might trust and serve in still new and exciting ways? Yes, there is one hope and it is found in the voice itself. For our gracious God, who sent His beloved Son to call the world to trust and serve, and this is not just another voice, for this is the heart of love and grace. And the sound of love always stands out from the voices of the night. Our hope for hearing and responding to the voice of God is the resonance of love in that call to trust and to serve.

**Voices in the Night!** We can hear that voice of love today, distinct from all the other voices we hear. Because of that love-filled voice, we can respond. That voice is a persistent one. Just as God called the prophet Samuel and

Philip and Nathanael, God calls us and God's call is very personal. Each person has a story to tell, but when we are called we know who is taking care of us. And because of that love-filled voice we can arise to come and see, to trust and serve.

PRAYER: Eternal God, we come to you in frank confession that we have fallen short of those lofty goals which you have set before us. Yet, in those times when we confront ourselves as we have become, we realize the urgent need for forgiveness and for assistance, as again we pledge to reach for those goals. Enable us then, we pray, as we embark on the newness of life which has been given us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.