

FROM PASTOR MARC'S DESK

As I'm writing these words (and perhaps as you are reading them), it is just a little over a week before my installation as your new Associate Pastor for Family and Campus Ministries here at Oxford Presbyterian Church. As I reflect on these days, I feel such a deep sense of gratitude to enter into this ministry together with you in this unique role here at Oxford Presbyterian Church.

Growing up, I had no concept of installation of pastors in our church. Installation was something you did to a refrigerator or to an air conditioning unit. The notion that pastors were "installed" was completely alien to me until I entered into the seminary.

When we talk about "installation" in the Presbyterian Church, however, we are talking about something much deeper in our lives together. We are talking about the beginning of a new season of ministry and service together and (more deeply than that), a new relationship with one another.

As we move quite literally from one season to another (winter to Spring, Epiphany to Lent...), I wonder if it's also appropriate to reflect on our relationships with one another and the ways that God calls us into different seasons of life together. You can read a bit more about that in Pastor Lawrence's article this month...

One of the passages of Scripture that you will hear next Sunday comes from the third chapter of 1 Samuel. It's the story of two very different characters (Samuel and Eli) in very different stages of life. When Samuel was a young man, the Word of the Lord came to him in the night while he was sleeping in the sanctuary of the Temple. At first, he thought it was the voice of Eli (his older pastor and mentor). Three times, Samuel hears a voice (God's voice) whispering in his ear, and three times he runs into his pastor's office saying, "What do you want? Didn't you just call me?"

"I didn't call you," he says, "Go back to sleep." How many times have you heard God's voice and written it off because we thought it was something else? Eventually, though Eli figures out what's going, and he uses the wisdom of his experience to guide Samuel into listening more closely. Listening for God's voice is not something that we do alone. It is something we do together as a faithful community.

It won't be the last time God's people hear that voice. Samuel and Eli's story in the Temple is just part of a much larger story (of which Samuel and

Eli are just very small parts). It is the beginning of a narrative of God's people listening for that voice again, and again, and again through many different seasons of life and through many different seasons of the faith.

As we celebrate this installation together, I can't help but reflect on how we are also part of a larger story, too. I can't help but feel a deep sense of awe and gratitude for the stories of the saints who have come before us, who have served where we serve, and who listened for God's voice in their own seasons.

I hope that we will remember that we are part of that story. Like Samuel and Eli, we come to it in different seasons of life. Maybe your season looks more like Samuel's. Maybe it looks more like Eli's. Which season are you in?

Regardless, I hope that their story reminds us that each of us plays an important role in the story that God is seeking to tell, and God has called us together to be part of it.

Listening for God's call and God's voice is not something that we do alone. It is a journey together where (like Samuel before us), our hearts sing out, "Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night." May God give us hearts to hear that voice together gratefully and joyfully...in this season and the next.