

**Sunday, January 13, 2013**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

**Sermon – “When God Calls”**

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Have you ever heard God’s voice?

The psalmist tells us that the voice of the Lord is powerful, full of majesty.

Isaiah tells us that the Lord who created us says, “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you: I have called you by name, you are mine.”

Luke relays that “a voice came down from heaven and said, “You are my son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.”

Three accounts of God’s voice breaking through everyday lives with life-affirming, life-sustaining messages.

Would it change the way you live if you actually heard God say that you were the Beloved?

Do you think that God is well pleased with you?

In the presentation we just heard from the Salisbury School students, it is clear that Martin Luther King heard God’s voice and never lost sight of the promise of God’s word.

It takes courage to answer God’s call because God calls us to transformation, to peace and to justice.

God’s message, throughout scripture, from Genesis all the way to Revelation, is a call for humanity, for us, to use our gifts to make the world a better place.

Our church, the United Church of Christ has been in the forefront of such efforts for hundreds of years:

**UCC Firsts**

In 1620 as the Congregational Pilgrims were leaving for the new land, their pastor, John Robinson encouraged them to keep their hearts and minds open to new ways. He reminded the holy pilgrims that

“God hath yet more truth and light to break forth out of his Holy Word.”

In 1700 Congregationalists were among the first Americans to take a stand against slavery. The Rev. Samuel Sewall wrote the first anti-slavery pamphlet in America, “The Selling of Joseph.” Sewall laid the foundation for the abolitionist movement that would come to fruition more than a century later.

In the 1730s as the first Great Awakening swept through the Congregational churches, Jonathan Edwards, one of the great thinkers of the movement, encouraged his congregation to “Recover the passion of a transforming faith that changes the course of our lives.”

The year is 1773 and five thousand angry colonists gather in the Old South Meeting House in Boston to demand repeal of an unjust tax on tea. Their protest inspires the first act of civil disobedience in US History – the Boston Tea Party.

In 1785 Lemuel Haynes is the first African American ordained by a Protestant denomination. He becomes a world renowned preacher and writer.

The 1800’s see the church develop the first foreign mission society; the first foreign missionaries are sent to India; first school for the deaf; advocated with the Supreme Court to free the slaves on the Amistad schooner, an effort that resulted in the formation of the first integrated anti-slavery society.

1853 Antoinette Brown was ordained as the first woman in history elected to serve a Christian congregation as pastor.

1959 at the request of Martin Luther King Jr, the United Church of Christ organized churches and won a Federal court ruling declaring that the airwaves are public, not private property.

1972, Reverend William R. Johnson was ordained as the first openly gay pastor in the Protestant church.

Last week the clergy of the Litchfield North Association banded together, in the tradition of our ancestors, and issued a public proclamation advocating an end to our culture of violence.

We are calling for a culture of peace. Peace is not just the absence of violence, but the absence of fear.

We want to help people understand that there are alternatives to interpersonal violence.

We want to reclaim the idea of the common good – the concept that we can coexist with our neighbor without fear.

Of his work, Dr. King said, *Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.*

This is the goal of our clergy group.

We want to be in the forefront of creating a community where there is no need for fear.

Some might say that the church doesn’t belong in a political battle – but I would say, look to our ancestors and understand that this is exactly where the church is called to be.

Politicizing these basic Christian values of peace and justice, has successfully undermined the historic power of the church to advocate for change.

Some might say that change is impossible and I would say, what if the psalmist, Isaiah, or Jesus had adopted that attitude?

What if our ancestors were afraid of controversy, unwilling to change?

Change is not impossible and change is not bad.

Spiritual writer Regina Ryan suggests that “when we are attuned to the voice of God we are able to surrender ourselves completely.

As we seek knowledge of God’s will for us, we also must ask for the courage, faith and conviction to live as God directs.”

She offers this prayer:

“O God, establish Your heart of perfect wisdom in me.

Paint a new picture in my mind, beyond my beliefs, fears, hopes and shortsighted perspective.

May Your will be done, in and through me now.

May my being, be a blessing.”

As Christians, we are called to step out of our comfort zones and challenge the status quo.

By virtue or your baptism you are called to follow the God who commands, “Thou shall not kill.”

You are part of a faith tradition that follows Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

The Holy Spirit is alive and working among us – alighted as a dove-gently resting on your shoulder encouraging you to live in hope – not fear.

Our proclamation for peace ends with Isaiah’s words:

*‘And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.’— Isaiah 2:4*

My colleagues and I are committed to working for peace, in our hearts, in our homes, in our communities and in our world.

I hope that you will join me.