

Come And Follow

Texts: 1 Samuel 3:1-10,19
1 Corinthians 6:12-20; Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18
John 1:35-42, 43-51

Let us pray

Samuel (*meaning "name of God" or "God has heard"*) was sleeping in the temple of the Lord where the ark of God was located. The Lord called to Samuel who answered, "Here I am." He ran to Eli and said, "Here I am. You called me."

"I did not call you," Eli said. "Go back to sleep." So Samuel went back to sleep.

Again, the Lord called Samuel who rose and went to Eli. "Here I am," he said. "You called me."

But Eli answered, "I did not call you, my son. Go back to sleep." At that time, Samuel was not familiar with the Lord because the Lord had not revealed anything to him as yet.

The Lord called Samuel, again, for the third time. Getting up and going to Eli, he said, "Here I am. You called me."

Then Eli understood that the Lord was calling the young boy. So he said to Samuel, "Go to sleep and, if you are called, reply, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'"

When Samuel went back to sleep in his place, the Lord came and revealed his presence, calling out as before, "Samuel, Samuel!"

Samuel answered, "Speak, for your servant is listening." Samuel grew up, and the Lord was with him, not permitting any word of his to be without effect.

If we could summarize the lessons of today's readings for us in one sentence it might come out something like this: God in Jesus has called us each by name, in our hearts, to be his disciples. Let us consider why this is so.

First of all, it is Jesus who calls us. But who is Jesus? He is the *logos*, the mind of God that became human and tabernacle among us.

At Jesus' baptism, which we heard about last week, God was revealed to us; the voice of the Father approved Jesus' ministry, and Jesus was then empowered by the Spirit. God in all three persons approves of all that our Lord does in God's name.

So it is Jesus who calls us. What does it mean to be called? The English word comes from the Greek word **kaleo** and means to **command** or **request to be present**, to come; for example, someone is called to testify in court. It can also mean to speak of or address by a specified name, or to give a name to someone.

So Jesus calls us. Who exactly are we whom he calls? We are ordinary persons, just like his disciples. The disciples were simple folk, fishermen of which there were many near the Sea of Galilee, ordinary people. They weren't the learned of their day or the wealthy. They lived simple, ordinary lives, just like we do. He comes to us exactly where we are.

There is a movie called *'The Left Hand of God'* starring Humphrey Bogart. It is about a renegade pilot who is shot down over China during World War II and is captured by a local robber baron. Eventually, he escapes and flees to a small Chinese village where he assumes the identity of a dead priest. As time goes on, he comes to be loved by the people who have not had a priest for several years. The change that occurs in the pilot, as he assimilates the persona of the priest, is astounding.

It struck me that God will use everyone, right where they are, to accomplish his purposes. So it is that Jesus calls us, just as he called the ordinary fishermen of his day. Jesus calls us each one by name. What is in a name? It is the distinctive designation of a person or thing. It is the opposite of something which is nameless, anonymous, or indistinguishable from something else which is just like it. It is the ultimate sign of respect. That is why I try so hard to get to know all of you by name, which of course leads me into some embarrassing situations.

In any case, it is God who calls us each by name in the depths of our hearts. Conversely, knowing God's name (Yahweh) gives us a certain degree of power to be able to address him personally (He can't ignore us when we call).

In today's gospel, John uses names throughout the reading. John sees Jesus and refers to him as the Lamb of God. When Jesus sees the disciples following him and asks them what they are looking for, they address him as "Rabbi."

Then Andrew finds his brother, Simon, and tells him that he has found the Messiah. Finally, our Lord speaks to Simon and calls him Peter. None of these people are addressed impersonally as "hey, you". No, they are people with a distinct identity. God does not address us impersonally either. He calls us each by name.

So it is Jesus who calls us, each one of us. How does God call us, each one of us? He doesn't ask us to come to him in a group. No, he speaks to us individually in our hearts. There is a story I have used in the past which I can't resist repeating here.

A four-year-old girl was at the doctor's office for a check-up. As the doctor looked into her ears with an otoscope, he asked her, "Do you think that I'll find Big Bird in here?" The little girl remained silent.

Next, the doctor took a tongue depressor and looked down her throat. He asked her, "Do you think I'll find the Cookie Monster down here?" Again, the girl did not answer him. Finally, the doctor put a stethoscope to her chest. As he listened to her heartbeat, he asked "Do you think I'll hear Barney in here?"

At that, the little girl looked up with her eyes wide and said, "*Oh, no. Jesus is in my heart; Barney is on my underpants.*"

God no longer speaks to us in a voice that we can hear, as he spoke to Samuel in our first reading. And since he can no longer call us physically, as he did his first disciples, Jesus calls to us in the depths of our hearts.

So, he calls us each by name to be his disciples. What is a **disciple**? It means a **follower**, one who has grasped another's teachings. The fact that you are reading the sermon today means that you are eager to grasp his teachings. Why is this important? His teaching can make a significant difference in our life.

Another word for disciple which we heard in the first reading is "*servant.*" Now this is a word that is near and dear to my heart. Now the English word deacon comes from the Greek word **diakonos**, which means **servant**. So, deacons are servants of the church of God.

Jesus calls us each by name to be his disciples. But recognizing the call is another story. In our first reading today, God called Samuel three times (by name, we notice) before Eli realized that it was the Lord who was calling Samuel.

I am very conscious of how so many people fail to hear the call of God, despite all the talk that the church does about how we are called to be followers of Jesus and despite all the sermons that state that we are called to be like the prophets and to hear and speak God's word to one another. Why?

Why do so many people, many of them fine people, many of them people who already believe in God and accept Jesus as their saviour believe that God is not speaking to them personally? That God is not trying to guide them in a particular way? That God is not reaching out to them?

I think that the answer is that people fail to hear the call of God, that they fail to notice how God is summoning them,

- ❖ not because that call is not issued
- ❖ but because they are either ignorant about how God calls us,
- ❖ or because they allow themselves to pass over that call, to set it aside as it were,
- ❖ and so they have become used to ignoring the Word when it comes.

The answer may seem obvious. The word to Samuel was his awakening to the reality of God; it was for God to speak. The word to Moses, his dramatic calling, was for God to wake him to his mission to lead his people out of Egypt.

God speaking in the garden to Jesus - was for his strengthening before the cross and so on. Each of us has to look deeply into our own hearts and discern how Jesus is speaking to us. And once we've heard his voice, we need to respond as Samuel did: "Here I am, Lord; your servant is listening. I come to do your will."

We are back in a lock-down situation as the COVID-19 virus has not subsided; so let all take time to pray, to encourage and call one another in the household of faith and ALL nurses, doctors, truck drivers, all essential workers, etc.

I would like to request your prayers for *Susan King-Kabu* and the family. Susan's elder sister, *Barbara Malinowski*, died in a terrible house fire in Powell River, British Columbia, on Wednesday, January 13, 2021. May her soul Rest Peacefully in the arms of her creator God.

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- We Are called # 720
- Jesus, Keep me Near the Cross # 335
- Here I Am, Lord # 574

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ, most merciful redeemer, for the countless blessings and benefits you give. May we know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly, day by day praising you, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

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