

When God Calls

Text: 1 Samuel 3:1-10 (11-20)

1 Corinthians 6:12-20 (Series B, 2nd Epiphany) Ps. 139:1-6, 13-18

John 1:43-51

One night Eli, who was now almost blind, was sleeping in his own room; Samuel was sleeping in the sanctuary, where the sacred Covenant Box was. Before dawn, while the lamp was still burning, the Lord called Samuel. 1 Samuel 3:2-4

Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Come with me!"

Let us pray:

There was a couple that lived in London, England some 140 years ago, they were Catherine and William Booth. For the first 10 years of their marriage, William kept asking himself, *"What should I do with my life. What is God calling me to do?"*

Late one night he took a walk through the slums of London's East End. Every fifth building was a pub. Most had steps at the bar so little children could climb up and order gin. That night William told Catherine now it seemed that God was calling him to do something for those children and their parents – "the down and outers" of London.

William Booth didn't have to go to some foreign country to find people who needed help. They were right there in front of him. Later that year, 1865, the couple opened the *"Christian Mission"* in London's poorer districts. This grew into what we know today as the *Salvation Army*.

There are many, many stories about people who hear God's call to do something special. We heard two such stories in our readings today. From the Old Testament we heard about the little boy called Samuel.

Samuel's mother Hannah had prayed in the temple that God if would give her a child she would dedicate that child to God. God answered her prayer and gave her a son. When Samuel was still quite young, she took him to the temple to assist Eli, the aging temple priest. Friends in Christ *Faith* and *Prayer* both are invisible but they make impossible things possible.

Little Samuel was fast asleep one night and he heard a voice calling him. He thought it was old blind Eli calling for help. But it wasn't. This happened three times and the fourth time he realized that this voice came from God. Samuel was still a little boy but God was about to use him to carry out his work and we know what a significant role he played in choosing the first two kings for Israel – Saul and David.

Then in the gospel reading Jesus called to Philip, "*Come with me*". Philip raced off and found his brother Nathanael and told him he found the Messiah. Nathaniel is skeptical that this was the Messiah. The Messiah was not coming from Nazareth. Nazareth was not even mentioned in the Old Testament prophecies.

So, Philip invited him to, "*Come and see*". For himself, when he met Jesus, his doubt was turned to faith. Nathaniel confessed, "*You are the Son of God! You are the king of Israel.*" We know that this call from Jesus led these two men becoming messengers of the gospel, telling people about the Saviour whom God had sent into the world.

Our God is a calling God. God calls, and sends: Throughout history, we find God calling people to carry out specific tasks – well settled *Abraham* was called to leave everything and go to a land that God would show him; the reluctant *Moses* was called to lead the people of Israel to freedom; the shepherd boy *David*, not old enough yet to shave, was called to be king; tax collector *Matthew* was called to be a disciple; the Christian enemy, *Saul* of Tarsus, was called to be a missionary to the Gentiles.

The brilliant musician and theologian, *Albert Schweitzer*, was called to serve lepers in Africa; *David Livingston* was called to as a doctor to Africa; *Mother Teresa* left her comfortable Albanian home to work among the poor of the poorest in Calcutta. You wonder why God chose some of the people he did, in fact, not some, but almost everyone he called to do a specific task would not have been our first choice.

- ❖ When God called Jeremiah to speak to the people, he was just a child. He lacked confidence and the eloquence required to stand against God's enemies – but God called him anyway.
- ❖ When God called young Mary to be the mother of the Saviour, it seemed so wrong. She was *too young, too poor, unmarried, too ordinary*, but God called her anyway.
- ❖ When Jesus called Peter and James and John they were simple fishermen with no special qualifications. At times they were extremely slow to catch on, but he called them anyway.

What is evident in all these examples is that the people whom God calls to do his work are ordinary people like you and me – people with weaknesses and handicaps, people with their fair share of marriage, family and inter-personal problems, people who don't have much going for them from a human point of view.

We're all invited, we've all been called ~ what is our RSVP? *"Respond, if you please."* I think of young Samuel, confused and wondering, and then, following his instructions from Eli, he answered with *Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening*. Later he grew into *a trustworthy prophet of the Lord*.

It is not beyond God to seemingly call the *wrong* people, for the *wrong* jobs at the *wrong* time and place. To us it seems all wrong, right; but God knows what he is doing. In every case, God is fully aware of their lack of confidence and skills. But called them anyway, even though the call might test their courage and commitment. God called them anyway.

- And so, at the burning bush God said to Moses, *"I will be with you."* (Exodus 3:12)
- To the doubt filled Gideon, God said, *"Peace. Don't be afraid."* (Judges 6:23)
- To young Jeremiah, God said, *"Do not be afraid, I will be with you to protect you.... I am giving you the words you must speak"* (Jeremiah 1:8,9).
- To the disciples, Jesus final words were, *"I will be with you always to the close of the age"* (Matt 28:20).

God hasn't changed one bit. I believe, God is as real today as he was to Moses and the disciples. He still does crazy things (*so it seems*) and calls ordinary people like you and me. He still challenges us; he still confronts us and tests us.

He still calls you and me to do his work in this world, even though we can think of a million reasons why he has chosen the wrong person. Most of us here were called by God to be a part of his family at our baptism. In the simple action of putting water on our head and the speaking of a few words, God called us to trust and have faith Jesus.

He called us into discipleship, to Centre our life on Jesus, to let the light of Christ shine through everything we do and say. God has called us to be a powerful and positive influence in the midst of so much darkness in our world. What is more, God wonderfully and graciously forgave our sins and assured us of life beyond this life.

And there's still more, as always when God calls, there is his assurance that he will always be there to help us and give us the support throughout life's journey. This is what I have learnt personally in my journey of faith.

We may not be unaware of God's call on our life during our baptism, but we can look back and see how God's call has affected us. His called us into discipleship and trust in Jesus.

- ❖ Effects the way we live our lives,
- ❖ the way we work together as his people,
- ❖ the love that we share, our attitude, and participation in worship,
- ❖ and the way we gladly help in the church and in the community with our time, energy and resources.

The call God issues to each of us is not just one time deal when we were baptized, but God calls us by name every day to turn away from evil and wrong to trust the Holy Spirit to guide us along the right path.

On days when things aren't turning out well for us, he calls us to pray, and rely on him for help. When sickness, trouble, jobless, and even death of a love one gets us down, Jesus calls us to remember his promise that he will always be near to strengthen us and give us the boldness to keep on going.

God calls us to do his work. He calls us to be powerful and positive influences in the lives of others. But you know, like the people whom God called in the Bible, our first reaction is: "Who me!" It's not hard for us to find every excuse under the sun and explain earnestly to ourselves (*and to God*) that this is not the best time, that there are others who are able to do this job better, that we don't have the time, or that we would be too scared to do anything like that.

We are in good company when we respond to God's call like that – *Moses, Jeremiah, Gideon* and many others did just that. God knows what we are like, with the excuses. He still loves us.

He assures us that we are his beloved children; he forgives us, and promises to help us, to guide and to give us the skills we need to fulfill the challenge before us. *Moses, Jeremiah, Gideon*, and the prophets of old were promised God's help and then sent to carry out the task God had called them to do.

When God calls ordinary people like us to be his disciples, to invite others to faith in Christ, to do acts of love and kindness, to be Christian parents and grandparents, to be active and faithful members of the Christian church, or whatever it might be that God calls us to do, God grant that our response might be the same as little Samuel. When God called, Samuel replied,

"Speak for your servant is listening."

What do you want me to do?

Amen.

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