

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

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

The stories about how Jesus called his disciples are all well known, and so is the story of how God called Samuel to be his prophet in Israel. In our time, 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.

Many people, who already believe in God and accept Jesus as their Saviour, believe that God is not speaking to them personally, that He is not trying to guide them in a particular way, or reaching out to them. One possible reason is because they are unaware about how God calls us.

That was the case with Samuel in today's Old Testament reading. The scripture says that he lived in a time in which the word of the Lord was rare. Samuel grew up in the presence of God. Like his teacher Eli, he prayed to God. Despite this, he was unable to recognize the call of God until Eli recognized that call for him. As a result, Samuel finally heard what it was that God wanted to say to him, that he was to speak the word of God to others.

How much are we like Samuel, thinking that the voices we hear in the night come from another room, thinking they are dreams as a result of eating before bedtime, thinking that the inner nudges we feel, come only from our intuition, or from the fact that our subconscious mind is able to play tricks on us?

God calls and speaks to us in many ways. Almost all of them are gentle, most all of them can be mistaken for something else. When we listen to those calls, we discover that the power of God is in them and behind them.

That is what happens in today's Gospel lesson. The power behind the call of God is discovered by one who decides to listen to it. The Gospel reading tells us that shortly after his baptism, which we celebrated last week, Jesus decided to go up to Galilee. He had already received Andrew and Simon Peter as his disciples. As he prepares to leave Bethany to go to Galilee, Jesus goes out and seeks him out Philip, in the same way He seeks out us, and He says to him, "follow me". Philip responds to this call, and as he prepares to join Jesus, he goes and locates a man called Nathaniel, telling him "We have found Him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth"

It appears that both Philip and Nathaniel were looking for the promised one of God, but Nathaniel is not prepared to accept that the call of God he has heard through Philip is in fact from God. Still, Nathaniel goes to check out what he has been told, and in doing so discovers that Jesus has special powers, for Jesus knows, without being told, where Philip was the moment before He called him.

Do we listen to our fellow seekers? Do we check out the calls they issue us, the call to meet the Lord in a particular place and time, the call to discover what we have been looking for? We believe that people who come to church are faithful people who have decided to follow Jesus, people who are struggling to do what is right, who worship and pray, who listen to the holy stories, and seek to obey the will of the Lord.

But still, how many of us believe that God has spoken to us?

How many of us believe that God has personally called us to do what we are doing? And of those who do believe this, how many believe that God is still with us, guiding us, or trying to guide us, each day?

God is calling to all of us. He is calling us, not just to follow him, He is also calling us to do and say particular things at particular times. He is calling us to walk a particular path with him, a path that is similar to, but not identical to, the path of all the disciples, apostles and saints before us.

God has a plan for each of us, God seeks to guide us, and that call is personal. God seeks us out in the same way Jesus sought out Philip. God is calling us by name just as he called Samuel by name. God calls in our dreams. He calls in the voice of those people who are trying to help us find our way. He calls through our spouses and our workmates. He calls when we pause to read his word. He calls when we are trying to decide what to do next. He calls when we gaze upon the heavens. He even calls out to us when we pray.

A lot of people speak to God, they pray to Him, without ever really considering how it is that God might answer them, without seriously considering how they are meant to listen to Him. God calls us for a good purpose. He calls us to come to Him so that He may transform our lives. He calls to us to listen to Him, and do what He tells us, so that He might change us, and our world, making it holy and good, full of love and joy, whole and at peace.

Let us listen for God's call wherever we are, in whatever we see and hear, be it in a dream we have just had, in the message of a sermon we have just heard, in the quiet voice we have heard inside us at the seashore, or in the words of a friend who is telling us how God has dealt with them, and what it is they think

God is trying to say to us. That happens when we belong to a church you know, that happens when we gather with fellow believers, sometimes they speak to us about God. Sometimes they have a message from God that is meant specially for us. Listen, too, to Scripture, and judge the things we hear by the Bible and by the Spirit that is within us. Examine the events around us and pray about them. Look and listen, and we will hear the voice of God, we will hear His call. Listen, and then do as we feel or believe we have been called to do, and if it is a true word, and it very often is, we will experience the power that is behind that word, behind that call. We will see things happen as promised, we will see changes that are good. We will see God glorified, and people who seek after only their own desires humbled. We will see mercy and grace, judgement and vindication. We will see new life arise out of ashes and new hope come out of despair. Listen and we will find what we have been looking for.

AMEN.