

God's call

**1 Samuel 3/1-10;
John 1/43-end**

Both the readings we have had this morning involve the call of God to individuals.

They offer insights about what we mean when we speak of being 'called of God'

We begin with Samuel.

He was a special lad - a special gift from God to his mother Hannah. He was dedicated to the Lord by her upon his birth and sent, when still very young to live with the Priest Eli at what seems to be a run down shrine at Shiloh.

The old priest in charge is ineffectual and his sons are a disgrace.

The worshippers there have little expectancy because we are told that 'the word of the Lord was rarely heard, and there was no outpouring of vision. A church in decay if ever there was one.

But there is a ray of hope, Samuel. He had a subservient role as a general dogsbody around the shrine and attendant to Eli. Like his teacher Eli, he prayed to God. Like others, he had heard the teachings proclaimed, the story of God's love.

Samuel lived in a special place - indeed the scripture says that Samuel grew up in the presence of God. Samuel then, of all people, should have been able to recognize the call of God. But in this familiar story - he did not - that is he didn't until Eli recognized that call for him. We are told that three times the Lord called to Samuel where he lay in bed, and three times he answered by saying "Here I am" and running out to see Eli in the next room.

On the third occasion that this occurs Eli perceives that Samuel is answering God's voice and instructs him to "go, lie down, and if the Lord calls you, you shall say - speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

And so it was that Samuel finally heard what it was that God wanted to say to him, and that Samuel learned the fate that was to befall Eli, and that Samuel learned that he was to speak the word of God to others.

This story reminds me of how many people fail to hear the call of God despite all the talk we get in the church 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, who believe in God and accept Jesus as their Saviour think that God is not speaking to them personally? that He is not trying to guide them in a particular way? That He is not reaching out to them?

Perhaps it 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 there, but because they are either unsure about how God calls us, or because they allow themselves to put aside that call, and grow used to ignoring the Word when it comes.

How much are we like Samuel - worshipping in a special place, - listening to the stories of God's love - and serving Him in His house and in His world. How much are we like him - thinking that the voices we hear in the night come from another room, - thinking that our dreams are simply the result of eating before bedtime, - that inner nudges we feel come only from our

intuition, or from the fact that our unconscious mind is able to play tricks on us?

God calls us in many ways. God speaks to us in many forms. And almost all of them are gentle, subtle, and can be mistaken for something else - that is until we heed those calls - then we discover the power of God is in them and behind them.

I like the strand in this story, which can be easily missed, about Samuel's humility. Doing the routine and sometimes irritating jobs faithfully and being called out of that.

I also like the strand in this story, that can be easily missed, about Eli being courageous enough to open Samuel up to receive God's call. He could, after all, had kept it all very cosy – "you're just hearing things, lad". Samuel wouldn't have known.

And then there's the gospel reading

The gospel lesson tells us that shortly after his baptism 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 finds Philip - he seeks him out - as he sought out Samuel, and as he seeks us out - and he says to him, "follow me".

Philip responds to this call and as he prepares to join Jesus he goes and locates a mate 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 is obvious from the text that they were seekers 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 and replies to him: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth" "Come and See" says Philip.

He does, and in doing so discovers that Jesus is a prophet, that he has special powers - for Jesus knows without being told where he was the moment before Philip called him. Jesus says to him: "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these. (or "You ain't seen nothing yet")

Very truly I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

That invitation to "Come and See" is completely different to Samuel's call.

For Samuel it was words from God, for Nathaniel it was experience.

Those words should be a part of our vocabulary. "Come and See" implies no commitment, just an invitation to discover, explore and experience.

It doesn't give the impression that those of us within the church know all the answers or know what is better for people. We don't know where it will lead. All we know is that it is an adventure.

We invite people to be open-minded.

I have problems with the view that those who have an opportunity to respond to God but don't, are cast into outer darkness. Not least, because there are different ways of seeing. Healing of the Blind Man in John 9.

Others have to be a part of our call.

As I look out among you I see people who have decided to follow Jesus, people who are struggling to do what is right, people who worship and who pray and seek to obey the will of the Lord. I see people like Samuel, and Philip and Nathaniel, people who work for God.

But do you truly believe that God has spoken to you?
How many of you believe that God has personally called you to do what you are doing?
How open are you that God could be wanting to speak to you today?

God is calling all of us -he 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 us- God seeks to guide us. And that call is personal. God seeks you out - as Jesus sought out Philip. God is calling you 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 those close to us. He calls when we pause to read his word, to pray or to meditate. He calls when we are trying to decide what to do next.

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.

Reflect on how we use a telephone.

God calls us for a purpose - a good purpose He calls to 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. If we want to hear God it certainly helps to hold the telephone right.

But being a part of a church means that we re also responsible for God's call to others.

Listen - and as Jesus promised to Nathaniel, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.