

## 2 Epiphany B

1 Samuel 3:1-20

Psalms 139:1-6, 13-18

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

John 1:43-51

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Grace and peace to you from Jesus who loves us.

God is good, creative, imaginative and persistent – in calling us.

We've learned that God calls to all kinds of people with all sorts of strategies; to Mary by way of an angel, to Joseph in a dream, to Moses with a burning bush, apostles by Jesus at the lakeshore. God isn't shy, but is determined to get us involved in the work of loving the world. And God has always invited us into this work.

Take for example the story of Samuel, which is an interesting one. He is fast asleep deep in the deep of the night in the Tabernacle. This was pre-Temple days when the people worshipped God in a portable tent-like structure, because God was on the move! It was common in the day for young boys to be dedicated to God and they would live and be mentored in the Tabernacle, growing strong in faith. That's why Samuel was there. (Hmmm, we've had sleepovers here at Holy Spirit – none of our youth were awakened by a voice... well, then they didn't go to sleep until about 3 am either!) That night however, little did Samuel know that it would be etched in his life forever and in the pages of sacred history too!

We often think of those First Testament days as dripping with the presence of God, but that wasn't necessarily the case. We read in verse 1, "The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread" (1 Samuel 3:1). People were hungering, thirsting for a word from a God who too often seemed silent. Then, like the quiet message to Mary, God tiptoes into Samuel's life, not with a loud announcement, or songs of praise, there was no choir of angels, but God crept into the dark and quiet night while Samuel and others were sleeping.

God's whispering is so quiet, that Samuel isn't even sure if he really heard something. "I did not call; lie down again," Eli defers more than once. It takes several tries, before they both realize this is no ordinary dream or human voice beckoning. Samuel, once he realized what was going on, accepted God's call and began to learn the sacred rhythm and tune of it – a call that was unique to him. The Tabernacle, a hallowed space, a place where divine and human converged, became a backdrop and beginning for a life of holy encounters that would redirect Samuel's future. Eventually Samuel became the one that would help Israel transition from a period of being led by judges to a time of

monarchs (like King Saul and King David.) He was actually the one to anoint King Saul as the first king over Israel.

But as a 12 year old boy in the Tabernacle that night, in that moment, he nor anyone else knew what was to come. There was no announcement, no proclamation, just a solemn invitation between God and a young man.

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How do we know when we've been called? What does it look like or feel like? Maybe you've never recognized God's call in your life. It isn't the easiest thing to figure out. We don't get a phone call or a card or a lightning bolt (I have gotten 3 physical letters of call from congregations which I believe are a mutual listening to the Spirit of God) and few of us sleep in the church awaiting a message. We might even conclude that *the word of the Lord is rare in these days*. But I don't think that is true at all. God is still speaking, calling, inviting. We learn what a call is by following the stories in the Bible – there's lots of them - we learn by opening our hearts and minds to the possibility, we learn by prayer and by God speaking through others.

[And just a side note – there are things we are NOT called to as well. That's sort of what we hear in 1 Corinthians. We cannot claim that we are called to bring harm to others or even ourselves. We are not to use the concept of a call for self-indulgence or promotion. A call is not a ticket for personal improvement, but is always for the benefit of the whole body of Christ.]

A call is quite profound. Probably the best example of this is from the gospel where Jesus is moving about calling the apostles. He's already got Andrew, Peter and Philip, who brings Jesus to Nathanael. Imagine here in Canada you're just sitting out under a weeping birch tree on an ordinary day contemplating life with its questions, doubts and dreams and Jesus comes along with a gaze that you can't take your eyes off of! Something in that moment spoke to Nathanael, to the core of his being and he knew he was going to get up from under that tree and follow – which he did.

That was a unique call, but no more so than God's calling to each of us. Nathanael never sponsored a refugee. Peter never volunteered at the Food Bank. Andrew, I'm sure, didn't start a safe injection site or campaign the city for affordable housing. They responded to the need in their own time and we do so in ours.

We might think that the things we do, the ways we help out are just ordinary things, but do you remember last week when I said that a sacrament becomes a sacrament when an ordinary thing like water, wine or bread is combined with prayer? That's when an ordinary thing becomes extraordinary! Likewise, when in faith we feed people, house them, listen to one another, pray for each other, join the work of justice making, welcome refugees, teach children about

kindness and Jesus, and so much more, those actions become something more than ordinary – they become a call, a call wherein we use our gifts and talents for the benefit of others and by which the world is made a different place.

It's not so much that God doesn't call people anymore, but I think it's that the idea of "call" has become lost in translation. Listen again people of God, for God is alive and well and still beckoning us to come and follow into a world where God and love, peace and hope are needed. Amen.