

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Second Sunday after Epiphany - Year B

46th Sunday of Pandemic

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

1 Samuel 3:1-10[11-20]

Psalms 139:1-6. 13-18

I Corinthians 6:12-20

John 1: 43-51

01/17/2021

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

43The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." 44Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." 46Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." 47When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" 48Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." 49Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" 50Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." 51And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

Called to the Body of Christ

Good morning! What we have today is two different call stories. In the first reading from the first book of Samuel, we hear the story of how he discerns God's call. In our Gospel reading we hear the pragmatic calling of Nathaniel. They're almost different sides of the same coin. In one we see mystical and spiritual forces at work, in the second, pragmatic observation. It's had me thinking of my own call story. (And if you're curious about what a call is, it simply means the way someone discerns God's calling to serve. We often think of call stories with people in ministry, but it's not exclusive to them.) I've shared my call story before, so I won't go into detail here, but it has more in common with Samuel than Nathaniel. I was at Camp Luther, the summer before my senior year, and after a long and emotional week, during a midnight communion service, I felt God calling me to become a pastor.

But not all pastors or people have this experience. My pastor growing up fell into this category. The son of a seminary professor, he grew up in the church and it just felt like a logical decision. Does that mean my call is more valid than his? Not at all! It simply shows that God can work in whatever way God decides to act! And as I thought about it, my Samuel-like calling was preceded by dozens of encounters that were like Nathaniel's. Friends, pastors, and counselors who all said I should be a pastor. Not in some mystical way, but just matter of fact.

So let's take a look at these two stories. Our first reading, I Samuel 3:1-10[11-20], holds a special place in my heart. I don't have a very good

memory, but this story in the Old Testament is one of the earliest church lessons that I can recall. It's not groundbreaking, no epic battles take place, but it still conveys a sense of something special. I always imagined a tired Samuel feeling his way through a dimly lit temple in the middle of the night, hand against rough stone as he wandered around trying to answer his master's summons. And then to find out it was God calling him! Talk about a surprise!

In contrast to this we have what I have always thought is one of the funnier Gospel stories. We start in the Gospel of John with the calling of the disciples. In it we hear the funny jab at Nazareth. *"45Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.'* *46Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?'"* We can sometimes forget that scripture, while important, can be funny too. Nathaniel then approaches Jesus, where we get this exchange: *"47When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!'"* Now here is where I always get another chuckle. Nathaniel naturally assumes that Jesus has discerned this through some sort of mystical or spiritual means. How could this Rabbi know such things? To which Jesus responds, saying "Well it wasn't anything special, I just saw you over there sitting under the fig tree."

It's a reminder that different people come to answer God's call, and so God calls us all differently. As one scholar writes, *"Each disciple sees something different in Jesus and bears witness in his own way. Each disciple came to Jesus with differing expectations and needs— one needed a teacher, another a Messiah, another the fulfillment of Scripture— and*

each of these needs are met.”¹ Some of us respond like I did. We ignore the first couple nudges from God and so we need a special shove to get going. Others are like Nathaniel, they respect a God who sees the practical as well as the spiritual. But here is the most important point: We are all called!

Martin Luther wrote extensively reminding the German population that serving God wasn’t just something that priests or monks did. My call to be a pastor isn’t any more important than your call to fulfill your own vocation. As Paul reminds us in his letter to the church in Corinth; “*15Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? ...19Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.*”² What we do, and how we do it matters! It’s all an answer to God’s call in our lives.

So when, in our call, we do things like destroy the Capitol building, we hurt the whole body of Christ. Meanwhile, when we act like Rep. Andy Kim who spent hours cleaning up after the riot, we strengthen the body. And it isn’t just big events that make the difference. In every second of our lives we respond to God’s call. Martin Luther used to say that a Christian shoemaker doesn’t spend their time praying all day over every pair of shoes, but instead tries to make the best shoes possible! Our response bleeds into every little action that we take. God has called us all, how are we choosing to respond? Amen.

¹Keck, Leander E. *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*. Vol. VIII. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2015. p. 455.

² I Corinthians 6:15, 19-20 NRSV