

Sermon January 17, 2021

Called to Service

Prayer for Understanding

Spirit of truth and life, speak to us in the rich and ancient words of the scriptures. Let us hear your call so that we may leave behind our old ways, and follow in the footsteps of Christ, the Living Word. Amen.

Sermon

In today's readings from the Lectionary:

- God calls Samuel and gives him a dire prophecy regarding the sons of his mentor, Eli;
- The writer of the Psalms praises the God's all-knowing nature;
- St. Paul warns Christians against immoral behaviour; and
- Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael to be his disciples.

In today's sermon, I will focus on being called to service by God.

When Samuel was born, Israel had no permanent leadership. During times of trouble, the people acclaimed a well known military leader to be their Judge. At the time of Samuel's birth, Eli, the Priest of the Shiloh Temple was considered to be Israel's Judge.

Before Samuel was born, his mother, Hannah, made a vow that if she bore a son, she would dedicate the child to the service of the Lord. Eli witnessed this vow, and when Samuel was weaned, Hannah gave Samuel to Eli to be a temple servant.

As related in today's reading, one night God called on Samuel. At first he was confused and thought that Eli was calling him. However, once he realized what was happening, Eli advised Samuel to answer: "Speak; your servant is listening", which Samuel did.

Samuel showed a complete trust in God when he responded positively to God's call. This should be a lesson to all of us; our faith in God should be a complete trust in Him. Samuel must have been troubled by the prophecy that God gave him; that Eli's sons would be severely punished for their disobedience to God. Eli also showed great faith in how he accepted God's judgment on his family.

And that's how Samuel began his life as a prophet, called to serve God.

In today's reading from John's Gospel, he describes when Jesus called Philip and Nathanael to be his disciples. The story shows an interesting contrast in how Philip and Nathanael responded to Jesus' call.

Philip accepted Jesus' call without hesitation; no arguments or questions. Philip then went to Nathanael to tell him that he had found the one prophesied about in the Bible. Nathanael had a question:

“Can anything good come from Nazareth?”

Nathanael seemed to be concerned with the source of this good news. He didn't seem to have a high opinion about the village of Nazareth. Or maybe he was joking, the way we would talk about people in Winnipeg not seeing anything good outside the Perimeter. Either way, he had questions.

However, Nathanael's questions were answered once he actually met Jesus. Satisfied with the answers, Nathanael accepted the call. He had faith; he just had questions.

Does Jesus still call us today? I think so. Jesus calls us to spread his message. He calls us to live good, moral lives, as Paul reminded the Corinthians. He calls us to be good family members and citizens in our communities. He calls us to help other people and meet their needs. These callings are not always easy to follow.

We also need to seek God's guidance in fulfilling our many callings. It's extremely unusual for God to speak directly to anyone nowadays. Usually, we have to discern God's will for us by reference to the people and events in our lives. As the Psalmist says in today's reading:

O God, how difficult I find your thoughts; how many of them there are!

Asking for God's guidance is a necessary step in opening our minds to discerning God's will for us. Often, we know the right thing to do; we just don't want to do it. In praying for God's direction, we can prepare ourselves to see what he is calling us to do. Before we can answer God's call, we need to open our ears to hear it.

On another thought, this idea of being called shows up in all sorts of ways. Some of you might have noticed that I wear a silver ring on my right hand. This is a professional ring for geologists, called an Earth Ring. When geologists receive this ring, we undergo a ritual to remind us of our professional obligations and we are given a certificate with the title of “The Ritual of the Calling of a Geologist”. The obligations of the calling are generally to work honestly and treat other people with respect. The ring is to remind geologists of the obligations that go with their professional calling.

So, what have you been called to do in your life?

- What do you do for your family and community?
- Do you seek to spread Jesus' message, if only by example?
- Do you reach out to help other people in their needs?

Think about it, and ask God in your prayers for guidance in fulfilling his will for you today. God may be calling you. Are you prepared to listen for that call?