

What Do We Do When God Calls?

Samuel 3:1-20 & John 1:43-51

The theme of today's scripture lesson is the call narrative. God calls the OT Prophet and Judge Samuel while he is just a boy serving in the sacred presence of the Ark of the Covenant. He doesn't know who or what is calling him until his Mentor, the old priest Eli, instructs him to stay still and listen: "*Speak Lord for your servant hears.*"

Philip invites his friend Nathanael to meet a remarkable man he just met who he thinks very well might be the Messiah. Nathanael is unimpressed but he takes his friend up on the invitation to "*come and see.*" When he meets Jesus and Jesus mysteriously knows all about him, the shreds of doubt fade away and Nathanael immediately proclaims, "*Rabbi you are the Son of God.*" Jesus calls him "*an Israelite without guile,*" and in essence tells Nathanael that he "*ain't seen nothing yet!*"

This weekend we celebrate the legacy of a great American prophet, Martin Luther King, Jr., the great preacher and Civil Rights leader who helped overturn segregation laws in the South and move this country to greater Civil Rights for all its citizens. As powerful as Martin Luther King's was one might expect that he had a profound Road to Damascus kind of moment that propelled him into this great ministry. But King himself reports that his call to ministry was not dramatic. After he became well known to the American public for his activism in the Selma, Alabama bus boycott, King wrote,

My call to the ministry was neither dramatic nor spectacular It came neither by some miraculous vision nor by some blinding light experience on the road of life. Moreover, it did not come as a sudden realization. Rather, it was a response to an inner urge that gradually came upon me. This urge expressed itself in a desire to serve God and humanity, and the feeling that my talent and my commitment could best be expressed through the ministry. At first I planned to be a physician, then I turned my attention in the direction of law But as I passed through the preparation stages of these two professions, I still felt within that undying urge to serve God and humanity through the ministry. During my senior year in college I finally decided to accept the challenge to enter the ministry. I came to see that God had placed a responsibility upon my shoulders and the more I tried to escape it the more frustrated I would become. A few months after preaching my first sermon I entered theological seminary. This, in brief, is an account of my call and pilgrimage to the ministry.

Three very different call narratives for three inspiring leaders among God's people. What ties them together? Only that in their various ways – whether through hearing God directly, or by invitation, or through a growing sense that this was his direction – God called and each of them responded.

God's call may indeed appear differently for each person. I think of the great old hymn, *Jesus calls o'er the tumult* (Hymn 549 & 550).

Jesus calls us; o'er the tumult
of our life's wild, restless sea,
day by day his clear voice soundeth,
saying "Christian, follow me."
As of old, St. Andrew heard it
by the Galilean lake,
turned from home toil and kindred,
leaving all for his dear sake.
Jesus calls us from the worship
of the vain world's golden store;
from each idol that would keep us,
saying, "Christian, love me more."
In our joys and in our sorrows,
days of toil and hours of ease,
still he calls, in care and pleasures,
"Christian, love me more than these."
Jesus calls us! By thy mercies,
Savior, may we hear thy call,
give our hearts to thine obedience,
serve and love thee best of all.

I believe that Jesus calls each and every one of us. First of all he calls us "*his beloved*." He calls us and claims us as his own. He calls us to seek his help and forgiveness and then he calls us to changed lives. He calls us to know and love him as our Savior and friend. And then once we do know him he calls us to serve the world in his name. He calls some to the ordained ministry, but far more likely he calls us in the midst of our ordinary lives, ordinary careers and ordinary families to be extraordinary people who are called by his name, transformed by his grace and who are agents of his love. *Jesus calls us o'er the tumult of our life's wild restless sea; day by day his clear voice soundeth, saying, "Christian follow me."*

What happens after we receive and follow that call? Well, that can be a wild ride. Samuel continued to hear and be faithful to God's Word. But ironically his own kids turned out to be just as big a disappointment to God as old Eli's before him. When the Hebrew people demanded Samuel that God give them a king instead of a temporary Judge like him to rule them, God used Samuel to anoint King Saul and later King David. Throughout his long career Samuel continued to listen to and be guided by God's Word.

Nathanael, or Bartholomew as he is better known, was one of Jesus' chosen 12. After he and the other Apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Bartholomew was led to proclaim Jesus' love to foreign peoples. Tradition says that he proclaimed God's love in Armenia and possibly as far as India. He was martyred for his witness. Tradition says that in Armenia he was skinned alive and then beheaded. Michelangelo portrays him on the ceiling of the Sistene chapel with a flaying knife in one hand and holding his own skin in the other. Rather famously the face on the skin is a self-portrait of the great artist. But the Armenians converted to Christ and were one of the first Christian nations.

This weekend we celebrate the powerful legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. His was a most difficult road. His home and his church were bombed repeatedly. He was arrested dozens of times in his nonviolent protest of unjust laws. He and his family were constantly harassed and threatened. And finally at age 39 he was assassinated in Memphis. In a speech the day before he died King proclaimed:

I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind.... Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land! And so I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man! Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!!

His faith and his passion for justice not only for his people but for all people led Martin Luther King, Jr to great heights as an inspiring leader and orator. It also led him along a dangerous road and ultimately his martyrdom at age 39. But through his dream for justice and civil rights for all, the landscape of our nation was changed for the better. There was and still is a long way to go but he had been to that mountaintop and he could see that promised land.

God's call can transform our lives. God's call can inspire us and others. If we let it, it can be the passion that rules our lives and makes each morning an exciting day to wake up. It may not always lead us on a safe and comfortable journey, but it's a journey worth taking.

Our theme today is the call narrative. And so I invite you to reflect on the ways that God is calling you. In the midst of our seemingly ordinary lives and ordinary families, how has that extraordinary love of God made its unique claim on you as his beloved? How have you learned to hear that voice of God's Word? What have you experienced and learned of his love on the way? How has God called you out of your comfort zone to serve others? Where is that call of God's love leading you today? Will you follow his call?