

2021 01 17 – Love Calls

1 Samuel 3:1-10 & John 1:43-51 (The Inclusive Bible)

Samuel was a young boy who lived nearly 3000 years ago. At a very young age, he entered the service of Eli, a priest who served their God, YHWH. Eli was responsible for the Tent of Meeting, a place where Israelites came as pilgrims to worship. It was the home of the Ark of the Covenant. And the boy, Samuel, both lived and worked in this holy place.

One night, while Samuel was sleeping in the Tent of Meeting, near the Ark of the Covenant, YHWH called to Samuel. As we heard in today's story, Samuel twice ran to Eli, thinking he was the one who was calling. It wasn't until the third time that Eli realized what was happening. So he told Samuel how to respond and when YHWH called the fourth time Samuel said, "Yes, YHWH, I am listening,"

It's not always easy to hear God's voice and to recognize it when the call comes. Sometimes, in our lives, it can even feel like God has gone silent. When times are difficult, it can be especially hard to hear God's call. Samuel lived in such a time. In the scripture we read: "in those days, the voice of YHWH was rarely heard." What do we have to do to hear it? And when it comes, how do we know that it's God we are listening to?

I invite you to think about your own experiences of the sacred. When and how have you heard God's voice in your life? In my own discernment process, I needed to hear God's voice multiple times and in different ways. One of the first

nudges I received was when I sitting in church one Sunday, listening to the minister preach and this thought just popped into my head out of nowhere. Suddenly I had the notion that I could do that, that I could preach. I'd never preached in my life. I was a project manager making a good living working for one the largest computer companies in the world. I wasn't looking for a change. So it was easy to ignore that first bizarre call, that strange voice in my mind.

But like Samuel's call, the voice came multiple times. I heard it again one Sunday morning when we were singing, *Here I Am Lord*, and the tears started falling down my face. Yes, God's voice came in my weeping. Then someone in the congregation suggested that I should try this new vocation. It took a couple of years and lots of soul searching, but eventually it became obvious that my call to ministry was real.

Like Samuel, I was lucky enough to have mentors, teachers in my life who have helped me discern my path. Has someone been an Eli for you? Has someone helped you hear and understand God's call? I remember, when I was leaving Calling Lakes Centre in Fort Qu'Appelle, I was emotionally and spiritually exhausted and I knew I wasn't ready to answer another long-term call to ministry. I had no idea what to do. Then, one day, I was talking to a colleague on the phone and he said, "Why don't you take a short-term appointment and give yourself an opportunity to discern what's next?" So I opened myself to that possibility and a few months later, I found myself here in Swift Current. And, as you know, that 11-month appointment has turned into a long-term call – six and a half years and counting.

Calls from God come to people of all ages and all walks of life. I decided to use two scripture readings this week because the boy, Samuel, is a bit of an exception. Not because he received a call from God, children are often wonderful listeners and interpreters of God's voice. But Samuel is an exception because he was called to his life's work at a very young age. Samuel was born and grew up in the religious life – he was nurtured for his ministry as a prophet practically from infancy.

But in the gospel of John we meet two men who receive their calls later in life. The first one, Philip, is a man from Bethsaida, the same village that Jesus' first disciples, Andrew and Simon Peter, called home. According to the gospel, Jesus meets Philip and says, "Follow me." And he does. What's not clear is why. Was it Jesus' powerful presence, his persuasive voice, his God-like demeanour? Or was it because Philip, like Andrew and Simon, was a follower of John the Baptizer and therefore had been groomed for the role and already knew about the one who baptized with the Spirit? All we know is that at that moment, Philip's life changed forever.

And very quickly he began to evangelize. Philip went searching for his friend, Nathanael, and told him that they had found the Nazarene, the one that the prophets had foretold. And Nathanael said, no doubt sarcastically, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" It's not hard to imagine someone using the same disdainful tone while describing a person from Swift Current, or any other small town. I'm sure we've all heard it. It seemed that Nathanael was not going to be

easy to convince. He had already assumed Jesus was just another false prophet.

I'm sure you know someone in your life who is scornful of religion and religious leaders in particular. In our increasingly secular society this is not unusual. And who would blame them? We just watched last week as people carrying bibles and Jesus flags stormed the Capitol building in the United States. If that was my only introduction to Christianity, I'd be scornful too.

But the good news is that when Nathanael met Jesus, he could see God's truth in him. Nathanael was fascinated by the fact that Jesus seemed to recognize him and asked, "How do you know who I am?" Jesus replied, "Before Philip even went to call you, while you were sitting under the fig tree, I saw you." Jesus made it clear that he had his eye on Nathanael from the beginning.

We are all under the watchful eye of the Holy Mystery, the Ground of our Being, the Essence of Love. And God is constantly reaching out to us, offering us an invitation. Obviously you know how that feels because you are here in this space. You have chosen to be in this sacred space on this January morning. You've already heard God's call and taken the first step.

Call stories are fascinating because each one is different, and yet they all lead us to the same place. They lead us to God, the God of Love, and they lead us to our own true selves, our own true callings. How do we know when the call is real? We know because the call is based in love and peace and justice. We

know because the call is not just about our own needs or our own wants. When God calls, when Love calls it is always about healing and transforming the world and often we are called to do it one person at a time.

Calls from the God of Love come in all different shapes and sizes and they come over and over again in our lives. When Love Calls, our job is to listen, to discern and then to follow. May it be so. Amen.