

Responding to God's Call — Rev. Denise Stone

Text: John 1:43-51

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

The Word of the Lord, **Thanks Be to God**

As I alluded to in my earlier announcement, today we are going to think about what it means, what it looks like to hear and respond to God's call. We will examine the lives of young

Samuel in the Old Testament and Philip and Nathaniel in the New Testament.

When you think of someone receiving a call from God, what do you imagine? Take a moment to ponder that question. What do you imagine takes place when someone receives a call from God?

Do you imagine a blinding light and audible experience like the Apostle Paul had on the road to Damascus? Do you imagine a person who is completely certain that what they feel is prompted by God and the Holy Spirit? Do you think that a person who hears / feels God's call knows exactly what the Call is meant to entail?

At the time of passage in I Samuel, Samuel was a young boy. Earlier in I Samuel we learn that the very young Samuel had been given by his mother to serve God in the temple and to be raised by the priest Eli. This was done as an act of gratitude for God allowing her to finally have a child. We may find that an odd action in today's world, but in Old Testament culture, it was somewhat normal.

When we encounter Samuel and Eli in today's text, it is nighttime; time for sleeping. Three separate times Samuel thinks he hears Eli calling for him. It took the third time of Samuel's coming to him in the middle of the night for Eli, the priest of God, to recognize that Samuel was hearing from God. How many times does it take us to realize that God is speaking to us?

Verses 9 and 10 of I Samuel chapter 3, say,

⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰ Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

Samuel did as he was instructed. “Speak, for your servant is listening.” What young Samuel will hear is both a message of hope and a message of judgment.

¹¹ Then the LORD said to Samuel, “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle. ¹² On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. ¹³ For I have told him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. ¹⁴ Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering forever.”

Samuel has not been told to DO anything. At this point in Samuel’s experience with God, he is just given the news that something new and amazing is going to happen. Samuel is given the news that the family of the man who has raised him, will no longer be the priestly family of God.

God's call to Samuel at this point was just to listen.

The next morning, Samuel was unsure of what to do with the information he had been given. Eli instructed Samuel to tell him what God had spoken to him, and so Samuel did.

Eli, being a man of God, responded to God's words to Samuel with "It is the LORD; let him do what seems good to him." Eli understood that the word of God had come to him through Samuel.

Verses 19 and 20 tell us about Samuel,

¹⁹ As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. ²⁰ And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the LORD.

Samuel responded to God's call initially by just listening. After he listened, Samuel grew up and the Lord was with him. "And all Israel... knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord."

Samuel listened and he grew.

Let us switch gears for a moment and think about Philip and Nathaniel.

John 1:43-44 tell us a little about Philip

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Now

Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

We do not know much about Philip. Just that he he was from the same city of Andrew and Peter, two other disciples of Jesus. That is it. That's all we know. We don't know if Jesus said anything else to Philip. We don't know if Philip had heard about Jesus and his teachings or miracles before Jesus came along and said, "Follow me."

We do know that from those two simple words, Philip went and found Nathaniel and told him "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Philip's response to encountering Jesus was to go share that news with Nathaniel.

Nathaniel was a bit more skeptical. There were no prophecies saying that the Messiah would be from Nazareth. Probably only 200-300 people lived there. It was no place special.

Philip told Nathaniel, "Come and see."

There is no better way to encourage someone to know Jesus than that response, "Come and see."

Nathaniel does. Nathaniel encounters Jesus Christ.

I find the following exchange fascinating:

⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸ Nathanael asked him, "Where did you

get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” ⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” ⁵⁰ Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.”

Imagine being in Nathaniel’s shoes. This brief, beginning of a conversation, reveals to Nathaniel that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, the King of Israel.

Oh, that we would be that open to hearing God.

Jesus then reveals one more aspect of who he is in verse 51,

“Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

This is an allusion to the Old Testament story of Jacob having a dream in which angels of God ascend and descend between heaven and earth.

Jesus is revealing to Nathaniel (and Philip) that he, Jesus, is the focal point between heaven and earth.

Samuel and Philip and Nathaniel respond to the call of God – and they respond in different ways.

Samuel was initially just told to listen. Then God spoke to him. Philip was told, “Follow Me.” Nathaniel was invited to

come and see, and he did. He came, he saw, he encountered God incarnate.

Neither Samuel nor Philip nor Nathaniel was given instructions to do mighty things. Just to listen to follow and to see.

Eventually, Samuel, Philip and Nathaniel would do more with the call they received from God. They all had to grow and learn first.

Responding to the call of God may include doing mighty things for God. Responding to the call of God often, however, begins with a call to listen, to follow and to see.

Samuel, Philip and Nathaniel received calls to come, follow and see, and understand, that God is about to do something new.

What is it that God is calling you to listen to and to see? Is God calling you to follow?

Do you hear God telling you that God is about to do something new and amazing?

Are you willing to listen, to follow and to see?

Are you willing to grow and learn?

Are you willing to respond to God's call?

Please pray with me.

You speak in unexpected places,
and with unexpected voices, God.
And we aren't always sure how to listen.

We aren't always sure who to listen to.
We aren't always sure if we're really hearing you.
Be blunt with us, please. Be clear.
Give us the challenge
of loving you,
of loving the other,
of loving ourselves.
And help us to live it out!
Because you are God who loves us all,
even when we don't know where to turn.
In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen!ⁱⁱ

ⁱ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ⁱⁱ <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/search/label/Epiphany%202020B>. Written by Richard Bott, and posted on **Sharing Liturgy**. <http://liturgy.richardbott.com/>.