

Called and Recalled. Vicar Joyce

1 Samuel 3: 1-10, 19-20, Psalm 139 1-6, I Corinthians 6:12-20, John 1: 43-51

When we don't hear God's voice, God will call us again.

When we don't recognise God's voice, God will call us again.

When we don't respond to God's voice, God will call us again.

The voice of God is not a physical sound from a heavenly direction - more an acute sense of the purity of love, the wonder of grace, the assurance of God's presence.

We are called into a future of hope, called with the voice of love, called as children of the light.

During Samuel's time Israel was ruled by judges. They were a Committee of Elders chosen because of their astuteness in human affairs, their knowledge of Israel's values and its moral codes.

God's message had been clear that this model was preferable to the later one of a monarchy sought by the people and finally granted by God. Samuel would be part of the transition for rule to be done by a king. Samuel was raised from boyhood in the temple in Shiloh, for his parents had dedicated him to God from birth. He learnt the foundations of his knowledge from Eli the priest.

Sadly Eli's own family were corrupt and would not be chosen by God to rule the country.

What interesting observations re society at this time. The word of the Lord was rare. There was little vision. Samuel slept in the same room as the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the Ten Commandments. Eli slept in another room. Samuel would tend the lamp of God by the Ark as one of his duties.

It was near dawn as the light was dim but not totally dark.

I wonder what kind of things *you* hear during the night when you wake up. It can be a special time of prayer. In your prayers do you spend time quietly listening? How easy it is to let our minds race with endless questions – even demands, but it's often in the listening that our prayers are most satisfying. Prayer becomes less of a shopping list and more a way of tuning in to God's presence.

Three times Samuel went to Eli thinking he had called out and needed help. Eli then recognised that God was indeed calling his young helper and instructed him how to respond. Samuel assured God that this time he was listening. The message was not an easy one to hear. It would make the ears of people tingle. It was even harder for Samuel to tell Eli and we can all understand why Samuel waited for morning. What a test for a young man to test his call as a prophet. Eli recognised and accepted the truth of Samuel's divine message and conceded power gracefully. This calling of God reminds us we may hear God's call on all kinds of matters at any age.

At the beginning of his ministry Jesus recognised he needed help. He couldn't send a message on Facebook, or text on his cell phone; he had to search out people and ask them to join in the ministry. In doing so he called ordinary people to help.

Philip, Andrew and Peter were from Bethsaida, a town just over the border from Capernaum in Philip the Tetrarch's territory which included many Gentile cities. Philip and Andrew reflected the Greek influence in the area. Nathanael had the Jewish name; he was the image of Israel.

The rest of the conversation is in relation to Israel, the name given to Jacob from Israel's early history. Nathanael is not a cheat, like Jacob, and he is to have a vision reminiscent of Jacob's at Bethel in Genesis 28. Note that he is something of a snob. Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Today we would say he was prejudiced. We could reflect on common prejudices today, perhaps New Zealand and Australia, North

Shore and 'them' across the bridge. It is intriguing and very reassuring that Jesus didn't carry these home-town bigotries and called people from all kinds of situations, jobs and places.

Philip was very excited while telling his friend about Jesus and he handles this put down well. 'Come and see for yourself, he tells the wary Nathanael. He did not put him down in return, just gave a short and warm invitation. A mini miracle persuades Nathanael into faith. Jesus knew he had been sitting under a fig tree before Philip called him. Again this is symbolic, an Israelite sitting under a fig tree reading the law. Nathanael is so impressed he gives a statement of his faith. 'You are the Son of God. You are the king of Israel.' What a wonderful result from a simple invitation to come and see!

How easy do we find it to share faith? Most of us are not called to evangelism but we are called to have sufficient courage to defend our faith and give an account of our personal experience of it if called to do so. Note the simple invitation from Philip.

Herb Millar, a researcher on how churches grow, found that 70% of congregational increase comes by existing members inviting a friend, neighbour or family member. People are also more likely to come again if they are visited by a parishioner, 85% in fact. If each of us looks out for someone to invite, not by pressure or argument but by a simple act of friendship, there is a feeling of excitement, of challenge, of expectation.

We cannot bribe anyone into the kingdom of God but we can say come and see.

We cannot argue people into the kingdom of God but we can say come and see.

We cannot shame anyone into the kingdom of God but we can say come and see.

Psalm 139 gives very good news indeed. That each person is wonderfully created and God is very close to them, caring for them. Some people hesitate when they hear the good news of God's love. Some folk fear that they will be made guilty or embarrassed by the Vicar or someone else in the church. Our personal care of newcomers reflects what was said of the early Church.

'See how these Christians love one another!' We too are human, of course, and one of our gifts to those we invite is to assure them that we are just an ordinary group of everyday people who have discovered God's unconditional love. So much in our current culture makes it hard for people to hear the truth of God's love so let's hope and pray that they will see it in us.

Three people were asked to speak at a large convention: Billy Graham, Jimmy Carter and a truck driver. The truck driver spoke of how he had spent his life drinking in public bars until one day he was told about the Christian faith. He became a Christian, then spent his time visiting those bars and telling the drinkers about faith. Fourteen others accepted the call of faith. Of the three speakers, his was the message that the audience remembered.

A simple witness is all we are called to give, a welcoming invitation. The hospitality of a friendly attitude is a powerful expression of the faith which we enjoy and share.