

## To Accept This Call, Press #1

[Texts - I Samuel 3:1-10;  
John 1:43-51]

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When we read about Biblical figures or contemporary individuals who claim to have received a direct call from God, we may find ourselves feeling a little doubtful, or disheartened. Don't get me wrong - I think it's great that young Samuel can hear and respond to the voice of God. It's fantastic that Nathanael receives a personal invitation to follow Jesus. And Martin Luther King's call - to bring about social equality through non-violent means - is clearly a God-given gift. Yet these kind of unmistakable, Divine Callings don't seem to happen very often these days; or at least don't happen to people that I know. Maybe you yourself have thought, "If God would just give me a sign! Nothing spectacular, just something to let me know that God is truly there - and that I'm on the right track!"

I think many of us, at one time or another, have desired some kind of personal encounter with the Divine Source of Life - an opportunity to have our deepest existential questions answered, or our deepest doubts dispelled. Perhaps something similar to those encounters described in today's Readings. So this morning I'd like us to think about what it might actually feel like - or be like - if you or I were literally *called* by God. How would we recognize that call? How would we know that it was really *God* speaking to us, and not just our own imagination? Would God sound like Morgan Freeman, from *Bruce Almighty*, or would She be more like Whoopi Goldberg in *A Little Bit of Heaven*? [I suppose if God sounded like either, it might raise some doubts... but who knows?] One thing we *do* know, is that Samuel, Nathanael and Martin initially had some doubts of their own. So hopefully, by looking at their stories, it can help us work through some of our own questions about this notion of hearing and responding to a Divine Call in our lives today.

Personally, I believe that most of us have *some* sense of a Divine Calling in our lives - otherwise, we probably wouldn't be in this particular place, at this particular time. I also believe that the Holy One extends some kind of call to *every person*; though certainly not everyone hears or responds to that call. In today's Readings, there are three particular things that stand-out, which I think can be helpful in allowing us to hear and respond to that Holy Call. These things are: *expectation, preparation, and acceptance.*

I begin with *expectation*, because much of what we hear, or don't hear, has a lot to do with what we *expect*. Most of us have been involved in conversations that have been misunderstood because of the *expectations* [or lack of expectations] of the participants involved. For example, a woman says to her husband, "If you want to go golfing, that's fine with me!"

He replies, "O.K., I'll stay home."

"Why would you do that?"

"Well, I'm sensing that you want me to."

"No, honey, really, please go and have fun! Actually, I'd like to have a quiet day at home, all to myself."

"Oh, O.K., great! Then I'll see you later, sweetie!" [argument averted!]

Our *expectations* can definitely affect both what we hear, and how we hear it. It's remarkable, that when I'm having a particularly bad day, I run into so many other negative and cranky people. Yet on my good days, almost everyone I meet seems reasonable and up-beat. Maybe, it has something to do with my own frame of mind, and my own *expectations*! Young Samuel certainly doesn't expect to hear the Holy One calling him by name. At first, he isn't sure *what* he's hearing. But after some repetition, and some words of instruction from old Eli, Samuel is ready to hear and respond to the Holy One.

For Samuel, as for you and me, *preparation* is another important part of tuning-in to the Divine Call in our lives. Samuel had been living and serving in the Temple for several years before he heard God's call. Those were years of learning and growing, listening and studying under Eli's mature guidance. And though Samuel is quite young when

God speaks to him, he is ready. Because, in a way, his entire life had been a preparation for that special, Sacred Call.

Similarly, Martin Luther King Jr. didn't just wake up one morning and say, "I think I'm going to lead a civil rights movement." The truth is, his entire life had been a steady preparation for that pivotal moment. His goal early in life, was to be a Baptist preacher, just like his father. And in 1947, at the age of 18, young Martin was well on his way. He became a licensed minister, so he could assist his father at the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. And by 1954, at age 25, he had graduated from college and seminary, and was installed as pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama.

Martin's dream of becoming an respected minister of his own congregation was progressing as planned. However, on December 5<sup>th</sup> 1955, something happened in Montgomery that would launch a different dream for Martin Luther King, Jr. and for millions of others. Rosa Parks, a seamstress returning home from a long day of work, was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on the bus to a white man. With her arrest began a boycott of the Montgomery Bus Company, which would last 381 days. And King, as the newly elected president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, became the leader of that boycott; and from that point forward, became for our nation a Messenger of the *Dream*.

The Dream was this: that freedom, equality, and justice might be realized by every person, regardless of race, color, or creed. And Martin Luther King envisioned and articulated that dream as well as, or better, than anyone. Much like the prophet Samuel, King's entire life helped him prepare for that one day when God would call him - through the convergence of circumstances, and the counsel of friends - to step forward and say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

Now all this is not to say that you or I won't be able to hear God calling us if we're not *expecting* it, or *preparing* for it. However, we certainly improve our chances of hearing that Call, by regularly practicing our faith and by being sensitive to the Holy Presence which surrounds us

each day. The important thing, is that we don't miss that Call because it comes to us in ways that seem too simple or too mundane.

Nathanael almost misses his opportunity, because God's Message comes to him in a completely ordinary way. Nathanael hears about Jesus - not in a booming voice from heaven - but by the personal testimony of his friend, Philip.

Philip says to Nathanael, "We have found the One about whom Moses and the prophets wrote. It is Jesus of Nazareth!" But Nathanael has trouble accepting that. How can God's Anointed One come from Nazareth, that little hick-town down the road? And how does Philip know that this Jesus is truly God's Messiah? It all seems too common, too improbable to accept. Yet Philip doesn't argue; he simply invites Nathanael to check it out for himself. "Come and See! Come and meet this Jesus, and find out for yourself!" So Nathanael accepts Philip's invitation, and God is able to touch and transform Nathanael's life through the most ordinary of means: the simple invitation of a friend.

This morning, the Holy One can also speak to you and me through seemingly simple and ordinary ways: the kind words or actions of a friend, or a stranger; the wondrous beauty of a winter's day, or the moving message of a particular song. Right here in this sanctuary, the Holy One can reach-out to us all: as we lift-up one another in prayer, partake of the Bread and Cup, join hands in a Circle of Blessing, and warmly welcome others into this Circle. Just as Philip said to Nathanael, you and I can also say, "Come and see! Come and meet this amazing Jesus - who lives and loves, in and through this remarkable Family of Faith!" By *accepting* Philip's invitation, Nathanael's life is forever changed. All it takes is the sincere invitation of a friend.

So if you've ever pondered what the Call of God might be for your life, then brace yourself, because here it is:

"Be that good and caring friend!

Reach-out to others with help and compassion!

And graciously invite them into your Family of Faith!"

The marvelous thing that happens when you and I warmly welcome others, is that the Holy One we seek, will quietly slip-in among them. So expect it, prepare for it, and joyfully accept it!