

14 January 2024 – The Call

Boyd Morgan, our sacristan, preaches his first sermon at Saint Mark's this morning. He begins: 'May the words I speak be those You want spoken, May the words we hear be those You want heard, May we live to Your glory'.

Readings:

1 Samuel 3:1-10. John 1:43-51.

Sermon: The Call – Boyd Morgan

As we have listen to the gospel reading, we hear the calling of the first disciples, an event that has profound implications for both our own walk with Jesus and the mission of the Church. As we delve into this Gospel reading, we encounter the figure of Philip, a man who had a life-transforming encounter with Jesus. Philip immediately recognises Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, the fulfilment of prophecies spoken by Moses and the prophets. Filled with excitement and a burning desire to share this good news, Philip approaches his friend Nathanael, exclaiming: "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

However, Nathanael is initially sceptical. He questions, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" It is important to note that Nazareth was not a town of great renown or significance during that time. Yet, Philip responds to his friend's doubt with a simple invitation, saying, "Come and see." Nathanael accepts Philip's invitation and proceeds to meet Jesus. To his surprise, Jesus already knows him intimately, declaring, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." This revelation causes Nathanael's doubt to give way to faith, as he declares, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

This encounter between Jesus and Nathanael illustrates the truth that Jesus sees us deeply and knows us intimately. He knows our doubts and hesitations, as well as our hopes and desires. He is not a distant God, but a close companion who walks with us in every situation of life.

In the first reading we find Samuel, a young boy serving in the temple under Eli the priest. At the time, the word of the Lord was rare, and there were not many visions. While Samuel was lying down in the temple, the Lord called out to him, saying, "Samuel!" This led me to think of calling; a big, Biblical word. Sometimes when we hear the word calling, perhaps we expect the biblical thunder bolt, or profound change, and yes sometimes this is the case as we have heard. Indeed, I take my own situation and think if you had asked me 5 years ago would I be preaching my first sermon in January 2024, I'm not sure I'd have believed you. Yet as much as I would like to talk about myself, I'll resist it in this first sermon.

It did however cause me to me to reflect on what calling means. In Samuel's calling, he simply thought it was Eli who had called him, so doing the most natural thing he responded by running to Eli's room as any servant would and said: "Here I am, for you called me." But Eli replied, "I did not call; go back and lie down." This happened three times.

At this point I do wonder what Eli must have been thinking. Perhaps he was worried for Samuel, perhaps thought he had delirium, perhaps he was becoming frustrated by the disturbance? Finally, Eli realised that it was the Lord who was calling Samuel. He instructed Samuel to go back and lie down, but this time to respond, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

Additionally, this passage highlights the importance of discerning God's voice amidst the noise and distractions of the world. Samuel mistook the voice of the Lord for that of Eli because he did not yet recognise God's voice.

I can only begin to think what that must feel like. To be told to go, and then to hear God's voice. To know what the voice of God sounds like. If you did, what would you say? What would I say? How would that conversation start?

When considering this, a 90's pop song sprang to mind called "What if God was one of us" by Joan Osbourn. It has the opening lines:

If God had a name, what would it be
And would you call it to His face
If you were faced with Him in all His glory
What would you ask if you had just one question ...

... and then it asks us:

If God had a face, what would it look like
And would you want to see,
If seeing meant that you would have to believe
In things like Heaven and in Jesus and the Saints
And all the Prophets

When studying the reading from Samuel, I couldn't get away from this song, and perhaps this gives an insight. A chain of thoughts towards the profound feelings that fall from the line, in the reading to go back and lie down, but this time to respond: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." Then we go back to look at the response to Nathanael's profession of faith, Jesus proclaims, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." What a remarkable promise!

This has suddenly become all very thunder boltish!

As disciples of Christ, we too are called to witness and take part in things in our own lives through our faith, our humanity, and our love for God and one another. Perhaps this 'call' is to take part in an activity, or, and here's another very big church word 'mission'. Maybe to help a charity, to hold a friend's hand when they need to be comforted. Or as is requested of Nathanael by Phillip, simply to "Come and see".

As humans we constantly do things to help others, to care, to love to support, could this be a call? That moment when we stop to speak to a stranger because they want a chat, could this be a nudge to love just a little more like Jesus? I believe it could. And suddenly that biblical word, that thunder bolt called "Calling" feels a little less remote. It is a little closer, tangible perhaps, just that little bit easier to comprehend, for we are all called to do things, in ways that are both clear and unclear, or simply just instinctive reactions to others.

When we align our will with God's will and strive to follow Him wholeheartedly, we are able to witness the power of God working in and through us. In closing, let us take to heart from the calling of the disciples as portrayed in the Gospel reading and the actions of Eli and Samuel in the first reading. Like Philip, may we be eager to share the good news of Jesus with those around us, inviting them to come and experience Him for themselves.

May we have the courage to extend the invitation, despite scepticism or doubt. Like Samuel, may we respond to the personal encounter with God and have open hearts and minds to talk with him. And, may we wholeheartedly embrace our calling as disciples, whether a thunderbolt-like event, or just those small acts that enable us to live just a little more like Jesus, confidently stepping into the world, witnessing heaven and earth intersect in our everyday lives.

May the Holy Spirit empower us to live out this calling, whatever it maybe, faithfully, and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all.

Amen

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