

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

January 17, 2021
Second Sunday of Epiphany, Year B

The readings this week:

- 1 Samuel 3:1-10, (11-20) ◦ Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18
- 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 ◦ John 1:43-51

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

The Call

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 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."
John 1:43-45

So here you are...following the call. Well, presumably you are attempting to faithfully follow God's call to you. Maybe you wonder. Perhaps you even doubt what you hear or sense. Are you where you had envisioned you would be at this point in your life, or have your travels-to-date been sprinkled with surprises or marked by mystery? Were there any roadblocks along the way, any compass alignments, perhaps a few "corrections" to your course? Most people I know, whether called to vocational church ministry or to the priesthood of all believers, have not experienced a straight, easy path of discipleship. Smooth sailing and clear skies of discernment haven't been a part of my reality. A teacher and writer, I had no intention of following a call to ordained ministry. Obviously, God had other plans.

What about your call? When did you first hear, or feel, or sense a call to follow Jesus? Maybe your call was more akin to simply ceasing to run from God or maybe just finally showing up and listening for instructions. Were you like Samuel of this week's Old Testament lesson, a church brat, who knew the language of faith and who lived in the shadow of ministry? Did the Divine call cut through all the church-speak and religious noise to rouse you from your slumber? Were there more seasoned saints along the way to guide you and help clarify the voices you heard?

Maybe you were more like Philip in John's gospel: You were just minding your own business and the irresistible face of Christ got all up in your daily doings. The next thing you knew you're telling others all about it and inviting them to the improbable party. Perhaps you're a bit of a skeptic like Nathanael who asks (I imagine more than a bit sarcastically) whether anything good can come out of Nazareth. You can just as easily replace "Nazareth" with the name of your own town, faith community, etc. and speak the line with heaping helping of disdain or at least a smidge of suspicion.

The point is—you are here. Something got a hold of your heart, your mind, your hopes, and your soul. For some reason you keep coming back (I hope it's more than a paycheck or a personalized family pew.) Jesus the Christ reached right across time, space, and eternity to make himself real to you in some form or fashion. The King of the Universe, God wearing skin and speaking your language, named and claimed you and KNOWS you—intimately.

Yes, friends, you can run (hard and fast) but ultimately you cannot hide from the one who desires a relationship with you, who loves you, and who has a thing or two to show you. The word of the Lord may be as rare in our time as it was when Samuel was a boy, some might even argue rarer still given the state of religion in North America and most other "highly developed" nations, but God is still speaking (thanks United Church of Christ). Our job is to listen. And then, when we hear that call to follow. As we follow, it seems we are to share, to tell, and to invite. After that we repeat the cycle: listen, follow, tell, invite. It's the hardest simple thing you'll ever do, but that's the job of the disciple, the one who is called to bear the good news to a hurting world in whatever way God calls you to do it.

It doesn't matter whether God got your attention as a tot, pursued you across decades of decadence, or found you through the witness of your friends, you have been called. You stand in the company of Samuel, Philip, Nathanael and a great cloud of witnesses. So if you still wonder whether anything good can come out of all this, rest assured that it can. Listen for the whisper of the Divine One who is still calling, guiding, and equipping you to follow.

~ Sharron R. Blezard, [Stewardship of Life](#)



Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: 1 Samuel 3:1-10, (11-20)

What's the clearest message you've ever gotten from God – and how did it come? In a time when few people heard from God, why is it significant that God chose a young boy as God's primary judge and prophet? What do we learn from the fact that Eli recognized God was speaking, and knew how to answer? Why had Eli stopped hearing from God? Despite this, how had God used Eli in developing and calling Samuel? Considering the message God delivered, how does this conversation signal a shift in Samuel's relationship with Eli... and what does this mean in his relationship to God? How does God prepare us through relationships to hear God's voice? Samuel had to learn to recognize God's voice because he hadn't heard it yet. God speaks to each of us in a different way... we must also learn to recognize it. If so, how can you position yourself to hear and understand God more clearly? [Faith Element](#)

Psalm Reading: Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

How can people tell what is valuable to you? From these verses, how can you know that God values you? What should characterize our treatment of others (the sick, poor, disabled, elderly) in light of the fact that we are all fearfully and wonderfully made? Which attribute of God mentioned in these verses have you recently seen firsthand? [Marysville Baptist Church](#)



Praying Toward Sunday

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!

~ Richard Bott, [Sharing Liturgy](#)

...Nothing is more seductive than the promise of intimacy. The allure of the Christian story – the Incarnation, the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the coming of the Holy Spirit – is that it opens you to a depth of your own soul you never even knew you possessed. This cycle of death and rebirth is your story, and in this story you are known better than you know yourself.

Each of this week's readings involve intimacy. Before Samuel "knows" the Lord, the Lord whispers to him in his bedchamber. Paul says that anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him (I Cor. 6:17) and that our very bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (vs.19). Jesus knows Nathanael's deepest heart.

Also, the lectionary offers that great hymn to intimacy, Psalm 139. "You have searched me out and known me..."

If I long to be known and loved, I don't need to go any farther than that prayer, gently hushing my complaints and putting my longings into perspective.

~ Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

3rd Reading: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

In verse 13 Paul starts with food and the body and ends up discussing sex and the body. How did he make that transition? What does Paul mean by saying that God will destroy both the stomach and food? How does that relate to what he says in verse 14 and God raising us up? Is God really going to destroy our bodies? What does Paul mean by saying that the Lord is for the body? [Assets](#)

4th Reading: John 1:43-51

What do you think of doubt and skepticism? Are they sinful? Is it possible that these are part of our journey of faith? What facts about Philip can we gather from this passage? What facts about Nathanael? In New Testament times, Nazareth was a small village with no historical significance. Why do you think Nathanael was so reluctant to believe "anything good" could come out of that place? How does Nathanael show his honesty and trustworthiness in this passage? What do you think was so convincing to Nathanael that he would almost immediately declare that Jesus is the Son of God? Jesus does not chasten – in fact does not even mention – Nathanael's skepticism. Why do you think this is so? How might Nathanael's doubt and skepticism have actually helped him find faith? In what ways might facing our questions – rather than avoiding them – help mature and deepen our faith? [Faith Element](#)