

St. Timothy's Episcopal Church  
The Rev. Frank F. Wilson  
January 17, 2021

**Second Sunday after Epiphany, Year 'B':** 1 Samuel 3:1-20; Psalm 139: 1-5, 12-17;  
I Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1: 43-51

**Title:** God's Call on Our Lives

---

Had we read all of the lessons prescribed for this Sunday, we would have been treated to not one but two stories in which a number of individuals are called into a particular kind of service by no less than God. Sandwiched in between is a lesson written from the hand of the apostle Paul speaking to some of what it means to have responded to what we in the church refer to as a call.

This word "call" or its variant forms, that is to say to be "called" or to receive a "calling" is one of those words that we in the Christian world use in a little different way than is common in everyday, ordinary speech.

For most of us the common use of the word 'call' has to do with communicating with someone such as to make a phone call or possibly to hail someone across the room. Or maybe to call someone out for having committed a misdeed.

But to be called or to receive a call within the context of the church is of a different kind.

For example, in the church we don't hire a priest or pastor. We extend a 'call' to such a one.

Furthermore, we don't speak of one choosing the vocation of ministry; we want to say that such a one was 'called' into the vocation of ministry.

In the church, to be called to ordained ministry involves a congregation in one's home parish recognizing in that person one who is being called by God to the priesthood, and it requires a bishop to concur that this is indeed a person who is so called.

So, this is one kind of call -- the call to ordained ministry. But let us be clear -this morning -- being called into ordained ministry is by no means the most important kind of call.

Our story from the Old Testament this morning is about the call of Samuel. In this somewhat humorous story young Samuel hears a voice and repeatedly goes to the

bedchamber of his mentor saying, "Yes master, here I am," for we see that young Samuel thought that it was Eli who was calling out his name. But this is a story of Samuel's epiphany, his hearing, or one might say his becoming aware that God had a special calling, a specific vocation in mind for him. Samuel is to be a prophet. And as we know, Samuel will indeed become one of the great prophets of the Old Testament.

Being called to be a prophet is a calling to a special, specific ministry, but, once again, let us be clear: such a calling is by no means the most important kind of call within the context of religious life.

There is a reason that in many churches the baptismal font is placed front and center of the church. The only reason our font resides in the rear is for convenience due to the lack of space. But the primary sacramental and symbolic moment in the life of a Christian, whether lay or ordained, is one's baptism. It is through our baptism, both yours and mine, that we recognize that one is called into a life of ministry and grace lived within the community of faith. And it is closer to this kind of calling that we would have seen had we had the time to read the Gospel appointed for this day. So, I will just tell you the story. It is from John's Gospel where we find that Jesus has come to the region of Galilee and he has simply said to Philip, "Follow me." We don't know a lot about Philip except that Jesus called him to follow - to be his disciple.

To be a Christian is not to be ordained, but to be called to follow Christ -- to hear that call, and to respond with a kind of joyful abandon. Notice that I suggest that a proper response to God's calling is joyful abandon. I did not say that the first response is likely to be a resolve to be or become a Christian.

Some might say, indeed some do say, that to be a Christian, to live a life worthy of the title 'a child of God,' means to make a commitment, to make a resolution, to resolve to be due diligent and to work at those things which will make us into a Christian. And indeed, commitment is a product of saying 'yes' to the invitation such as Christ offered to Philip when Christ said to him. "Follow me."

But dear ones, what I want to suggest here this morning is that responding to the divine call on our lives is more akin to accepting an invitation to a party than it is a signing up for something. Being a Christian is not so much about joining a church (although that is important to our Christian walk) - but it is much more about embracing the love of the Divine Lover.

Responding to the divine call on our lives to embrace the divine good is more like jumping *off* of a spinning wheel which has no destination and *on to* that ground where is God's peace and purpose.

Responding to the divine invitation is much more about being than doing. It is much more about who we are than what we do. Responding to the divine invitation is more about allowing ourselves to become children of light than it is about imagining that we could ever do enough of those things which are pleasing to God such that we might then become acceptable to God.

Yes, words like commitment and resolve have their place in one's Christian journey, but such is not the starting point. To place Christian doing in front of being a person who simply delights in the love of Christ is to put the cart before the horse. A Christian walk is not so much about resolve as it is about joy. As our collect said this morning, joy in just knowing God's love, joy in hearing God's call to be in God's presence and following God's ways. It is about worshipping joyfully. And it is about joyful obedience. It is about inviting joy into one's life. It is about embracing the joy that comes from saying 'yes' to the divine invitation.

Mike Yaconelli wrote of such things.

In the book entitled, *The Dove*, he said, "Commitment is a fine word...in most contexts. But as a religious word, a word that defines faith, it has always [seemed] oppressive [to me]. It puts all the responsibility for my relationship with God on my shoulders.

"If I am committed," he wrote, "I am consistent, regular, disciplined, strong-willed. This doesn't sound like Christianity," he mused, "it sounds more like a diet."

Then Yaconelli went on to say, "I discovered the 'hunger,' and my soul began to tingle. Faith [it turns out] wasn't so much a discipline as it was [the feeding of my] hunger.

"I had been hungry for God from the very beginning," he wrote. "I wanted to hang around God, to know God. I was full of unnamed longings for God, but I was told they were irrelevant. I was told that what was relevant was my commitment - commitment to Bible study, prayer, and witnessing. But with all this emphasis on the doing my hunger for simply being in the presence of God was being neglected. Although I'm sure not intended, I was being told that I couldn't appreciate my hunger. Instead, I was to suppress it.

And then I discovered that a hunger for God is a gift, a sign of the Holy Spirit, and assurance that God is alive in your heart. "It is the fertilizer," Yaconelli said, "from [which] commitment grows.

Yaconelli had discovered that what God calls us to is to be human beings first and human's doing second.

What this pilgrim had discovered was that we are called first to make ourselves available to the love that comes from the Divine Lover and that we are called to be in a relationship with that Love -- both as a giver and receiver.

What this pilgrim discovered was that those things that we *do* as Christians are a natural response to God's love. Just as we want to please our beloved, our partner in life, those with whom we are most "in love," so we come to deeply desire to do those things which are most pleasing to God in response to God's love for us.

As Yaconelli might have put it: Our faith, our joyful giving of ourselves to God's love, care, and mercy is that which gives birth and nurtures our living into a life that is pleasing to God. The natural response to love is an uninhibited response to that love and which then manifests itself in loving acts towards others.

Dear ones, we are all called to be not only lovers of God, but through Christ to enjoy the inspired life God intended. May we all hear that voice which calls each and everyone of us to be children of the light. May we all hear Christ calling out to us, "Follow me." And may we all know the benefits and the joy that emanates from a life lived in obedience to God's will and in response to God's love.

*Amen.*