

When God Calls

Bible Reading:
1 Samuel 3: 1-10
John 1: 43-51

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You gotta feel for the two central characters in our bible passages of this morning. Neither of them really had much to show for their lives -

Samuel - a young boy in foster care. Earlier chapters of the bible tell us that His father had two wives, and a large number of kids to care for. His mother, rather pious woman, the moment he was weaned, brought him to the temple and left him there in the care of the priest, who according to the bible wasn't exactly a model parent. Samuel was basically left as a small kid to fend for himself in a large religious complex; a very tiny cog in a huge machine.

Nathanael - a serious sort; spending time under a fig tree - which was the popular place for people of his time to plunk themselves when engaged in mid-afternoon prayers and meditation. We don't read anything anywhere else in the Bible about this fellow. Nothing said about his background or occupation. Totally non-descript character. The sort who would never stand out in a crowd - take a photo of a bunch, and noone would ever pick him out.

No - there is no record that either of them had really made much of their lives. Grunts, really - both of them.

Sort of like the character that you're about to witness -

Comes from the opening scene of the movie *Antz*. How many of you have seen it? It's a computer-generated look at life in an ant colony, particularly that of one little grunt.

We'll come in right at the beginning where this poor little worker is getting therapy. He's trying to find himself in the big scheme of things; feeling very....

.....and here's the key word of the scene.....
feeling very **insignificant**.

Watch it with me -

[play first 5 minutes of *Antz*]

Did you catch it?

In the middle of the hubbub – all the noise and activity, and there he is, a little insignificant nobody.

But he's bound and determined to make something of it by his **attitude**.

Know what?

Lot's of people resonate with this little fellow.

How many of us aren't caught up in the big corporate, industrial or bureaucratic machinery - like one small cog?

When we're no longer needed, the email flashes on our screen to come to the meeting, and within the hour we're out.

So -

Is all we show for this; is all we can muster.....

.....just a bit of determined attitude?

Is that the best there is?

Samuel, Nathanael - what do you guys think?

Well, while they can't come back to us from the ancient past -

Nathanael about 2000 years ago

Samuel closer to 3000 years ago

We can certainly get a sense.

Samuel discovers that God is calling him by name.

Nathanael realizes that he was being watched, carefully,
even in those moments when he thought he was all alone.

They experience, each in their own way, the truth that another person wrote about with these words:

Lord, you have examined me and you know me.

You know everything I do....

You see me, whether I am working or resting;

You know all my actions....

You are all round me on every side;

You protect me with your power.

[from Psalm 139]

For both of them, their lives are changed.

Samuel lays on his bed and says, "*Speak Lord, your servant is listening.*"

He is taken to become a prophet of God, speaking God's will throughout the nation in very influential ways.

Nathanael - other Bible writers refer to him as Bartholomew; he ends up as a disciple of Jesus, and some historical sources suggest that he ended up as a missionary, carrying the word about Jesus as far, perhaps, as India.

Both of them under the watchful gaze of God - even when they weren't aware of it.

Samuel - called by name.

Nathanael - Jesus said to him, "*I saw you*"

Now -

Both of them were in a situation that you'd think would make you aware of and ready for the call of the Lord. You'd **think.....**

Samuel is a worker in the Temple - the house of God. This is where the national prayers were uttered. This is the place where the sacrifices were offered. Here is where the Holy Law and Prophets were read. Here is the place of God's Sacred Ark of the Covenant. The priests were here.

Samuel **lived** in this environment. Breathed it in.

But when the divine word comes - "*Samuel*" - it takes him a few tries before he figures it out. The top man in Israel's religious system is rather slow on the uptake, too. Takes him a bit before he can set Samuel on the right track.

"Samuel!"

"Huh? Say what?"

And then there's Nathanael - sitting under that fig tree having his spiritual quiet time - praying, meditating. His buddy comes along to say, "*I've found him – the one that all of us in Israel had been praying for, asking God for, longing for - He's here! Come on!*"

To which comes the deeply spiritual response – "*Yeah, right!*"

"Nazareth? Can anything good come from there?"

Like someone in our setting talking about finding a great solution to a global problem. "*Yeah, there's this fellow up in New Liskard.....*"

"New Liskard?? You've GOT to be joking!"

If that's the way it was for these two people who were immersed in a prime spiritual setting; pumped as it were and poised to be receptive;

if they were in that setting and still just about missed out on God's call to them.....

What about the rest of us?

How many of you could identify with those millions of ants - worker, soldier, worker, soldier – plunk, plunk - you've got your place, go do your thing, and pick up the pace!!

When you're caught up like some ant in a huge hill -
how do you expect to be able to hear the voice of God?

Which makes me very glad that you've taken the time to put down the busynesses that consume all your resources;
you've put them down and come to this place.

Hear what the bible readings are suggesting -
Hear and understand,
Don't ever, ever forget -
There **IS** a call; a heavenly call for you.
God's great, holy hand is on your life.

You are **not** merely some drone in a huge machine destined for oblivion.

In another place, the prophet Isaiah speaks important, eternal truth when he relays God's word to His people -
*Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne?
Though she may forget, I will NOT forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; the
challenges of your life are always right before me.* [Isaiah 49]

Can you believe that;
accept that to be true about your life?

I pray you can, and do.

The God who made you takes a deep interest in every moment of your life - even as He entered the lives of that little boy in foster care, and that non-descript fellow under the tree.
And he calls for your response.

Calls for your response with this promise -
Very truly I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

I'm not sure how many of you get what Jesus was telling Nathanael in those words. He's reaching back into ancient Israelite history, the story of Jacob - when he, as a young man, was a fugitive - running away from home. Alone, in the desert, he has a dream of a ladder reaching to heaven and angels going up and down this ladder. He realizes then and there that he is not on the run alone. He is closely connected to heaven - always.

When we are willing to come alongside Nathanael and make the move towards Jesus, to say what Nathanael said -

You ARE the Son of God!.....

When we can say to him, "*You are MY king*"
we will, through Jesus, also come to experience angels coming up and down into our lives.
Heaven becomes open to us.

Rather than being shut out, we become, through Jesus, actually drawn right **into** God's sacred presence.

Let me tell you that it changes everything.
You belong somewhere - the family of God.

You belong to someone - a child of the Creator.
You are fully welcome in heaven.

Jesus makes that certain.
And **no one, nothing** can ever take that away from you!!

The deal is done -
The empty cross behind me stands as silent symbol for that.

Jesus was excluded, he was crossed-up and crossed-out
so that we would be welcomed in and eternally cared for.

In one of Bill Keane's "Family Circus" cartoons, the yard is filled with children playing as only children can. They are yelling and screaming, blowing horns, and crying. The dog is barking, a jet flies overhead, and two boys are beating on a drum. Inside the house, the mother of one of the children says to her husband, "Listen. That's PJ crying!"

Mother's ears were conditioned to hear the sound of her child's voice, even above the din.
Understand that when you call, when you pray, God's ear is **always** conditioned to hear your voice.
He will respond.

We're going to share Holy Communion in a few moments.
A bit of bread, and a small cup -
tiny things — just like our lives seem, sometimes, so tiny.

But they represent something cosmically HUGE.
They represent the body and blood of Jesus that was broken in payment for, to wipe out all the sin, all the wrong, all the blemished and half-baked parts of our lives.

See in it the extent of God's care for you.
How far He was willing to go to hang on to you.

And in the quiet of this morning's space -
Listen.
Listen carefully.
Listen in your heart.
Can you hear him call to you?