

Different Calls I Samuel 3:1-10; John 1:43-51; Psalm 139 :1-6, 13-18 1-15-2012

Every now and then, I have some time to stop and reflect on the direction my life has taken in general, and to consider how I have responded to the call into ministry I sensed and answered over 30 years ago. I might do this when a new year dawns or even during some warm summer day. Sometimes I wonder if, in my human-ness, I have managed to hear any variations or changes that may have been sent my way. Have I missed something? This might just be a factor of one of those life reviews we do at different points in life or it might be peculiar to pastors.

I also pause and consider call stories like those in this morning's scripture readings. Two very different calls are noted in them. One was a direct, persistent voice in the night and the other came from a friend.

Samuel, who had been promised to God by his mother, heard God speaking to him. He wondered at first if Eli was calling him. Eli, being far older and truly wiser told him he thought it was the voice of God that was being so persistent. Samuel responded the fourth time God called his name time and God told him that he was needed to speak to the nation Israel. Samuel listened, obeyed and became a revered prophet.

The second "call" story from the gospel of John was a human call. Philip had been tapped on the shoulder by Jesus and had decided to follow him. In turn he told Nathanael that he believed that Jesus was the messiah and that Nathanael needed to come along. Nathanael was dubious but changed his mind when Jesus told him he had seen him under a fig tree—a very trifling thing but enough to turn him around and have him become one of the original 12.

Like many of us, Nathanael had resisted a bit before he packed up and turned his life around into another direction. It doesn't seem as if he gave his decision very much thought and, perhaps, that is the best way to answer any call. When any of us thinks a matter to death we usually end up deciding to make no new change in our lives and we very often miss the call into a new way of living and moving and having our being.

I know that I resisted even entertaining the thought that I was being called in a new direction for about three years. I knew that Congregationalists had been formally ordaining women since the 1800s but I had never seen one. I grew up in a politically conservative, yet theologically liberal congregation that had never seen one either—or if anyone had, they never admitted it. So, when I heard a persistent voice calling in the night and in the day and through many events in my life, I was sure I was hearing things. No, it was not a little voice in my head, it was just a growing and persistent sense that I should be finding my way to following the ways of Christ with more certainty. I also hesitated because I did not want to “rock any boats” and face any drastic changes that affirming, what I thought was a call would bring.

Friends attending seminary listened to me and said, “Resist if you wish, you are being called into ministry and you can run but you sure cannot hide.” These friends, all young men, were a bit like Philip to me. While I hesitated and doubted that I was in any way cut out to be a pastor, they quietly and repeatedly tapped me on the shoulder and encouraged me to take the next step. This was much to the dismay of some in the congregation and the great delight of others. The person who had been a bit of a gadfly was being called to take on a role that would present her with gadflies bigger than she ever imagined. It was and is very funny.

In time the leadership of my church realized that I was moving forward with this and they gave their grudging support, assuring

me that I would not make it through the rigors of seminary and that no church would issue a call to me. The not-so-silent majority reminded those few folks how wrong they were on the day of my ordination.

God chooses those God wants to use. God chooses all of us to be used in different ways. We all have unique gifts and talents that can be used to build up the Body of Christ and to sustain it. There should be no doubt in our minds that this is true. Just pause for a moment and consider the many different ways people serve this church. The many ways they serve God and try to work with some sort of harmony to show others how it can be done. We don't always get it right, but we always have another opportunity to find a better pathway.

Those who are born organizers keep the rest of us from wandering around looking for direction—we have a lot of born organizers. Those who are creative and inventive throw out ideas that might seem a little broader than we want or need but the organizers take those ideas and give them form freeing the creative people to take off into another idea. Those who are just plain hard workers always show up to give a nice solid base for those creative ideas and to help the organizers get their acts together. And, round and round it goes.

All it takes for things to find their feet and move forward is a voice calling in the night or a tap on the shoulder and the response, “Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord? I have heard you calling in the night. I will go Lord if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.” When you hear it, try answering that call, it will make all the difference in your world and in the world around you.

Amen