

Who's Calling?

1 Samuel 3:1-18

Crossroads Christian Church

John 1:43-51

Jan. 18, 2015

Epiphany 2B

Samuel was just a boy in a very dark place, but it didn't frighten him. This place was a temple to Israel's God, and he was used to finding his way around in the shadows. Always, before the altar, there burned a lamp to signify God's eternal presence.

Samuel lived in a temple. He remembered his mother Hannah, and the story she had told him again and again. His mother Hannah and father Elkanah had wanted a child so desperately, but God never seemed to grant their wish. Every year they would make offerings at the temple at Shiloh, and all the younger women, children in tow, shook their heads sadly. One day, Hannah went to the temple herself to pray. There, she became overwhelmed with her grief, and begged God to please, please, let have a child. Hannah sobbed and shuddered. Eli, the priest, came up to her and began to scold her. He thought she was drunk, and blubbering from too much wine. But Hannah told him that she was praying for a son. Eli heard her case, and answered, "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him." Hannah went back home to her husband, and eventually she bore a son, whom she named Samuel.

The boy Samuel remembered this story, and that his mother had dedicated him to God. This dedication was no easy thing, for it meant that Samuel would go to live in the temple, to serve God and the priest Eli. Samuel missed his mother greatly, but he was fond of old Eli. He found his way to his quarters and went to sleep on his mat. It was quiet in the temple, except for the noise the wind makes in old buildings. A voice. "Samuel." His eyes popped open. Someone had called his name. He tossed on a robe and dashed through the temple. "Did you call, Master?" he asked Eli. The old man woke up and rubbed his eyes. "Uh, no, no, I didn't call. Please go back to bed." Sleep came again, but again came the voice. "Samuel." His bare feet slapped the stones of the temple floor and he again woke up the old priest. The sleepy old man began to dismiss the lad, then stopped. "Samuel, if you hear the voice again, don't come running to me. Say, "Here I am, Lord," and just wait and listen." Imagine the boy's heart pounding, his mind racing. Who else is in the temple? Who could be calling me? Slowly sleep returns, and so does the voice. Samuel! "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

The message that God delivered there in that darkness was a harsh one, words of judgment about Eli's sons who were supposedly priests but cared nothing about God or the people. It was a terrible thing to lay upon a boy, and for the boy to have to deliver to the old priest, but Eli accepted the message graciously, because he knew deep in his heart that God was right. The boy Samuel grew up to be a great prophet, one of Israel's greatest

spiritual and political leaders, a pillar of strength who helped unify his country.

Did Phillip know Jesus before Jesus walked up to him and said "Follow Me"? We don't know. Certainly he knew *of* Jesus. You can't keep a secret in a small town, where everybody knows everybody, or in a network of small towns. People keep track of their kinfolk and neighbors, for better or worse. Some were turned off by Jesus, and thought he was a crackpot; a religious fanatic. Others were intrigued, still others fascinated. He knew that his friends, the brothers Peter and Andrew, had been looking for truth in the teaching of John the Baptist, and that John the Baptist had pointed them to Jesus. "Here is the one you should follow. He is the lamb of God, coming into the world." But Peter and Andrew, well, they were impetuous, some would say gullible. Was Phillip surprised to receive Jesus' invitation, Jesus' call to follow, or was he hoping, expecting, dreaming that it might happen? At any rate, alongside the lakeshore, below the dry hills of Galilee, Phillip found himself a disciple. But what about his best friend, Nathanael? Didn't he expect the Messiah, too? Didn't he look for one who would bring hope to Israel? So Phillip said, "Guess what? We've found him! This is the one the law and the prophets told us about! Jesus of Nazareth!"

Nathanael scoffed. "Nazareth? That dirty flea-bag town? Can anything good come from Nazareth?" But Phillip said, "Come and find out for yourself," and Nathanael followed Phillip. Nathanael had never met Jesus, but Jesus walked up to him like a long lost friend, and in a few words, Jesus had Nathanael captivated. Jesus knew him in his deepest soul, and Nathanael knew on the spot that this was the one, the Son of God. So they followed Jesus around Galilee, Samaria, Jerusalem, all over the map, and learned more and more about God's light and love through knowing this man Jesus.

Dietrich was living out his call to be a pastor and a professor in a difficult, tragic time. The Nazis were taking power in his homeland, Germany. He repudiated their violence and racism, and was appalled to see the state Lutheran church retreat into quietism. He was invited to learn and lecture at Union Theological Seminary, and when there, his colleagues offered him safety in our land. But God called him back to Germany, where he founded an underground seminary to teach candidates for ministry who could stand up against their demonic government. Dietrich even got involved in a plot to assassinate Hitler. He was arrested and martyred just before the end of World War II.

Martin had already been called to ministry; he even had a Ph.D. in theology. He was ordained and was following in his father's footsteps in serving large, prestigious African American churches. But was God calling him to something more? Was God going to do something about Martin's frustration with the laws and customs that made him and his brothers and sisters second-class citizens? Could he be an agent to bring God's will for

justice into an unjust situation? Then Rosa Parks was arrested. Her crime? She had a seat in the colored section of a crowded bus, but refused to give it up to a white man. She was tired; Physically tired after a long day's work, but also tired of being treated as less than a human being. With dignity, she allowed herself to be arrested. The black churches rallied around her. Who would help mobilize the response? Martin said here I am.

God's call comes in many ways. Sometimes it's in a call to ordained ministry. Sometimes it's a call to other forms of ministry, the ministry of the laity. Or sometimes it's a call to take whatever situation we have in life, be it a job, a family, or our social settings, and find ways to let God's love work through us.

God's call comes to each of us. When we come down the aisle, whether as a child, a youth, or adult, and confess Christ as Lord and Savior, we're responding to God's call to follow Jesus. When we step into the baptistry, we're baptized not just into church membership, but into being believing, active Christians. God can call us to a vocation—perhaps a church vocation, perhaps medicine or teaching or working with the poor, but almost any job can be a response to God's call just by the way we do it. If we let Christ shine through in the workplace by our attitudes and actions, then we're doing God's work.

God can call in other ways, too. You each have gifts, and are called to be stewards of these gifts. Your volunteer time, your serving on a committee here at the church, your visiting shut-ins and bringing them cheer, your teaching in Sunday school, your coming to choir practice and singing praise to God, are valid and wonderful responses to God's call.

Who is calling? God's calling. What's God calling you to do? I don't know. But if you pay attention to your heart, if you ask in prayer, if you put your defenses down, you'll find out. Like a little boy in a dark temple long ago, you can say, "Speak, Lord. Your servant is listening." Amen.

By Michael E. Dixon