

The Old Testament reading, this morning, and the gospel reading speak to us of the call of God. These instances of God calling people, the boy Samuel in the Old Testament reading, Philip and Nathanael in the Gospel, are instances of what the Church calls "vocation." "Vocation" has several meanings, the most common of which simply means the type of career a person pursues. But when the Church speaks of vocation, the meaning is different. In Christian usage, vocation means what God calls a person to do. It is the work that God would have one do to accomplish God's purpose, to help him build up his kingdom on earth. Vocation is not limited to the clergy. All baptized persons have a Christian vocation, if only, sometimes, a general discipleship with specific taskings, on occasion, as God gives direction. We must never forget that as the high point of God's creation, human kind is called into an alliance with God, a covenant call as ancient as Abraham of the Old Testament. Through Abraham, God called the Hebrew people to be his people, the especially chosen people of God. Through Jesus Christ, God calls all of humanity to be his people and to become very members of the family of God. When we are baptized, we become part of the covenant, and vocation follows.

In the Old Testament reading this morning, we hear the delightful story of the vocational call of Samuel. This young man, this boy, was living in the Temple with the priest Eli, assisting Eli, because the old man was going blind. In the stillness of the night, Samuel heard a voice calling him by name. He thought it was the old man. Eli knew better. "Next time," Eli said, "say speak Lord, for your servant is listening." Samuel grew up to become one of the great prophets of ancient Israel.

The gospel reading continues this theme. In the gospel story, Jesus is in the process of picking his disciples. He finds Philip and says to him, "Follow me," and Philip does. Jesus works through Philip to extend that call to Nathanael, but in the course of Nathanael's calling something very interesting happens. Nathanael questions how it is that Jesus was calling him. Jesus replied, in so many words, "I knew you, even before I called you. I even knew that you were sitting under the fig tree, where Philip found you." God knows what he wants and whom he wants, and he knows what each of us is capable of doing in his name. In Christian vocation, God always chooses the right person, at the right time, to accomplish God's desires.

Each and every one of us, through baptism, is called to discipleship. In baptism, we are called to be followers of the Risen Lord. But discipleship, as a baptismal obligation, is a general calling. From time to time, God calls us to special work. He has, for us, a specific task. Sometimes the vocation is for a lifetime of specific service; sometimes it is both specific and limited. Regardless, when it happens, it is God's call to you. The vocational call is God asking you, not compelling you, but asking you to be his obedient servant. You can say "No." God, in his love, has given us the freedom to choose. But if you would be his faithful servant, you will not say, "No."

The good disciple, the faithful disciple is much like the boy, Samuel. Samuel listened for God's call and, when he heard God's voice, he obeyed. Philip and Nathanael heard Jesus calling them to discipleship and willingly and joyfully followed him. If we would be good disciples of Jesus, we will not fret about whether we will understand the call when we hear it and have the skill to do the work. You will understand what God wants because if you truly want to discern God's will for your life, the Holy Spirit will make it known. Our obligation, like Samuel, is to listen. When we listen to Jesus and follow him, we can never go wrong. When we listen and follow, we grow beyond the narrowness of self, to accomplish wonderful things in the name of our Savior. When we listen and follow Jesus, God's work in the world gets done through our hands, our hearts, and our minds. Then, truly, we are faithful servants. *Amen.*