

Year B – Proper 2, January 17, 2021

✚ So, you're just dozing off to sleep and out of nowhere, someone calls your name. You sit up and listen carefully: "Did someone just call me?" Silence. And you figure it must have been a cat howling outside? So, you lie down again and close your eyes, but a minute later you hear it again. Now you're sure it's not a cat. You get up, turn on the lights, do a quick walk-through your house; you don't come across anyone. You look outside – front and back. There's no one there. This continues through the night and you begin to think maybe you're hallucinating and should see a doctor. You have no one with you who might be able to make sense of this voice.

✚ Or, you're walking through the park on a nice day and a stranger walking by with a couple of friends calls you over and says: "Follow me." How strange. Would you drop everything and follow him?

✚ And here's a third scenario. A friend comes up to you and says: "Hey, you've got to come and meet this guy. I really think this he's the one – you know the Messiah!" You think your friend has maybe spent a bit too much time in the sun, but you humour him and go with him. When you meet this person, you have this strange dialogue. As you approach with your friend, this strange man says: "Wow, I see you've brought not just any friend, but this man is

purity and honesty itself.” He does say it with a bit of a twinkle in his eyes. You look at him kind of suspiciously and say: “Have we ever met? You don’t know me.” He responds: “Sure I do – I just saw you a few minutes ago under that tree.” Then with a rather sarcastic tone, you look him straight in the face and say: “Oooh – you must be the Messiah!” This stranger suddenly gets serious. His tone changes and he says: “If you think me seeing you under a tree and knowing you is amazing, just stick around. You will see heaven and earth turned upside down. You will see God.” What do you do next? Do you just drop everything and follow this man, or do you walk away kind of baffled?

✚ Maybe you have heard Jesus call your name. Perhaps it took a friend to make the

introductions. Maybe it was a wise elder who sensed God’s call in you and helped you to hear it? Perhaps you feel that God has never spoken to you in any way, and no one has ever taken the time to introduce that voice to you, which I can assure you is very real. One way or another, God calls each one of us out of our slumber to wake us up to enjoy something truly amazing – the fullness of our own lives.

✚ Jesus, who is the fullness of God and to whom we are grafted in our baptism has called us all to follow him. Perhaps that call came via your parents who brought you into the Church and had you baptized as a child, or maybe it was later in life that you were awakened to a bigger life in Christ.

✚ God, I believe, speaks to every human heart, calling us all into a unity dwelling within the love and peace of the Divine – even beyond any religious or faith tradition. But God calls to us very specifically. For many people, that call is to be a faithful Hindu or Muslim or to practice an earth spirituality or simply a call to serve the greater good with no awareness of a spiritual reality. For Christians, God has called us to follow Jesus.

✚ As with any call, the important questions are always: “Are you listening?” “Do you understand what is being asked of you?” “Are you willing to commit yourself to the task, even if it is challenging, outside your comfort zone or dangerous?” Let’s hone in on the call to follow Jesus. Whether we’re faithful or not, all

those baptized in Jesus’ name share the same call.

✚ Last week we renewed our baptismal covenant, which outlines the parameters of this call to follow Jesus and even become a part of his living body. In short, we are called continue the telling of Jesus’ story, to be an active part of his body - charged with his life through breaking bread and praying together (in other words being an active Church member). We are called to resist evil and when we mess up, to ask forgiveness and get back on track. And we are called to share this good news story with others both by what we say and what we do. We are called to be awake to the fact that God dwells in all human hearts. All human life is sacred, so we are called to love and serve one another. In

the same vein we are charged with the task of actively working to achieve justice and peace, ensuring the dignity of every human life.

Finally, as the only species on this planet with the power to destroy or to nurture all life, it is our responsibility and our vocation as

Christians to use that power wisely, because all life is sacred.

✚ That is an immense and daunting vocation to bear, but that is what we have been asked to do. That is what it is to follow Jesus. This is our calling. When Samuel was first called by God in the night, he was asked to condemn his master and mentor, Eli and all of Eli's house. He was scared, but he did it and the world didn't fall apart around him. Philip, Nathanael and the rest of the disciples were called to give

up everything and walk with Jesus, learning from him, doing as he did so that after he was gone not only the story, but Christ himself would always be here, and I doubt that any of them regret their decision to follow Jesus.

✚ We have been called to take up the terms of this covenant and make them more important than anything else: our possessions, our passions in life and even our friends and family. In this calling, we pledge our whole selves to the way of Jesus. That doesn't mean we are to abandon all that gives us pleasure in life. God gives us all these things for our enjoyment. What it means is that within the larger call to follow Christ, you may hear the voice of God calling you to a specific piece of this covenant work that might mean making the choice to leave

something you enjoy – even love - behind. But, God never calls us to something that in the power of the Holy Spirit – the spirit of Christ within us, we can't do. It's just a matter of trust. I have made some scary decisions in my life in order to be obedient to the specific calling that God has asked of me, and I can tell you that whenever I have said “yes” to God my life has only grown richer and more meaningful.

✚ I want to conclude with a word of comfort in all of this. We are never alone in this task, and I don't mean we always have God with us (although that is true). What I am referring to is the Church. Our particular calling to follow Christ cannot happen outside this body of Christ in which we find love, friendship, support and help in living out our piece of the

covenant of which we are a part. The Church also provides us with a place to learn about and grow in Christ, so we are never sent out without proper instructions. The Church mentors us – it helps us make sense of what we are hearing, so that we don't get it wrong and make fools of ourselves or even worse cause harm to others. Without Eli, Samuel wouldn't have responded to God's call. Eli shared his wisdom with Samuel, and the Church shares its wisdom generously if we engage with it in meaningful ways, so that when our hearts feel warm with the presence of God, we have some guidance as to what it means. In all that we do in Christ's name, we are never alone. We have the love, help and mentorship of the Church, which is nothing less than the living body of the risen Christ. We have gathered this morning to

remind ourselves of that, and at the end of the service I will send you out with God's blessing to be Christ in the world and to know and share the love and peace of God.