

**1 Samuel 3:1-10, John 1:43 -51**

A couple of evenings ago, it fell to my lot to read a bedtime story to two four year olds. The chosen story was Rapunzel. This fairy story contains many of the archetypal images found in most of these stories. There is an evil witch who takes a vulnerable baby from her parents and eventually incarcerates her in a tower. There is saviour prince who is caused to fall into a bramble bush and is blinded. But, of course, the prince eventually finds Rapunzel and his sight is restored by her tears of joy. For centuries, stories like this present young children with the great themes of good and evil, love and hate, greed and jealousy in the relative safety of their parents or grandparents presence. They introduce the child to the nature of the world in which they will grow up. They convey important truths and stories remain an important medium throughout our lives to enrich our experience and help us gain insight into many things.

We have heard three stories in our readings this morning. The recent inclusion of an Old Testament lesson is enabling us to hear, perhaps for the first time, or to hear again some of the great stories and narratives from that body of literature. The Gospel presents us with another story from the life of Jesus and the third story from the book of Revelation uses allegory to convey its message.

A good story is one with which we can identify and the story of Samuel is full of human interest. We have an account of an infertile woman, taunted for her childlessness, pleading with God to give her a child. If her prayer is answered, she promises to give her child to the service of God in the Temple. So when Samuel is still an infant, she places him in the care of the elderly priest. One can imagine there being grave concern if a similar situation arose today. The story we have heard this morning is of that child, now probably adolescent, hearing his name called during the night and eventually the Priest recognising that it must be the call of God.

The theme continues of another calling in the Gospel reading. This time it is one of the accounts of Jesus calling those who would accompany and assist Him during His earthly ministry and beyond His death to become the founders of the church. I was reminded of another account of Jesus calling the fishermen Peter, James and John to leave their daily occupation to become 'fishers of men' When I was a child we sang choruses, sometimes with words direct from the Bible. This was one of them – 'I will make you Fishers of men if you follow me. A mother of my acquaintance heard her small son singing this chorus but listening more closely realised he was singing 'I will make you vicious old men...' I suppose the lesson here is that taking things out of context, particularly from the Bible can seem meaningless and be open to misinterpretation.

What both these stories convey is that God calls us to live in communion with Him and then to work for Him in what we sometimes call Christian vocation. The call is firstly to follow – to become a disciple – making Christ the centre of our devotion and seeking to live according to His teaching. It could be that if you are relatively new at St.Faiths, you are here in order to explore that call to follow Christ and the Christian Way and you may want to talk to someone here about that possibility.

Secondly God calls us, once we have embarked upon the Christian journey, to represent Him both in the church and in society generally. Which leads us to one of the most widely debated questions in Christianity: how do we recognise the call of God? I was once involved in the assessment of individuals who felt themselves called to serve God in full-time ministry. Part of the task was to evaluate whether they had truly received a call from God. Not an easy task since their experiences and

their responses to what they felt to be God's call, were as varied and diverse as they were. And that's an important issue.

Samuel distinctly heard a voice which led him into a role as God's prophet to the nation of Israel. It's possible that some people today experience God's call as if it were a physical voice. The more pragmatic among us might become concerned about our mental health if we heard a voice. But there is more than one way of hearing. How often do we say: 'I hear what you say' – not just the words but I grasp the meaning of what you are trying to say – I get the message. So too can we 'get the message' from God in a number of ways.

In the reading from John's Gospel, Nathanael who is brought to Jesus by Philip is astonished by the capacity of Jesus to know and understand him. Since we are known to God it is likely that He will communicate with us in a way in which we are most likely to hear.

That call might come when we are confronted by a particular need. We talk of a prick of conscience – could it be a nudge of the Holy Spirit urging us to a response?

Some of us are very practical and knowing that God requires us to work for Him in general terms, will feel prompted to assess our skills and availability and offer ourselves accordingly – just as many of us have done in relation to the Auction of Promises today.

I have often heard people say that God has called them to do something that they really don't want to do. I also think that sometimes He communicates with us through our own desire – 'This is something I really **want** to do' Some might argue that motivation might be questionable in this case but if that desire leads to the greater good of the Kingdom of God and of others then it is of God. In our humanity motives are often very mixed.

The stories we have considered today confront us with the spiritual truth that God communicates His intention to us and we hear in a variety of ways: through conscience, through intuition, our own desire and plain common sense. The important issue is one of receptivity. We will hear if we have attuned ourselves by praying like the young Samuel: Speak Lord for your servant is ready to hear.