

Imagine if your phone buzzed and you saw “Call from God” on the screen. God’s Call comes to several people in today’s lessons. Young Samuel heard it asleep in church, some of John the Baptist’s disciples heard it down near the Jordan River. Today we also hear the Call to be God’s followers in our world. We are, with Samuel and the disciples, *called to “Come and See,” and called to “Go and Tell.”*

In today’s lesson, Nathanael hears from his friend Philip that the long-awaited Savior has finally appeared. Nathanael has some pretty serious doubts, but his friend invites him to simply “Come and See.” And so he goes, and he ends up following Jesus.

I have wondered how Nathanael could have so quickly changed his mind, so completely, *just because* Jesus says he had seen him under the fig tree. Well, imagine a scene, a little before today’s reading, for context:

Jesus had met up with John the Baptist, where John was preaching and baptizing. John quickly shares with two of his disciples the exciting news: “This Jesus, he’s the *one*. The one I’ve been telling you about.” So, Andrew and the unnamed disciple run off to share the news with Andrew’s brother Simon (otherwise known as Peter, the “Rock.”) They spend time learning amazing things from this Jesus, and become more convinced each day that John was right about Jesus being the Messiah.

Pretty soon they go and tell Jesus about their friend Philip, whom they know because he too comes from Bethsaida, their hometown, on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus calls Philip to come along with him. Philip is thrilled, and goes to find yet another friend, Nathanael, so he can share what he has learned.

“Nathanael, he’s here, now. The one we’ve been waiting for--and what’s more, he’s from your neck of the woods, from Nazareth.”

Now, Nathanael was pretty skeptical about this, especially about anyone from Nazareth. “Everybody knows about the lousy reputation of those rabble-rousing so-called prophets from Galilee. They stir up so much trouble, they like to get us all killed by the Romans, just for being in the neighborhood. And Nazareth, huh-- that’s a two-bit town, it’s just up the road from my hometown. No, Philip, you’ll really have to sell me on this one. But Philip just says “Come and See.” And so, Nathanael goes.

Now things begin to get interesting. Jesus no sooner lays eyes on Nathanael than he says a very strange thing. “Now here’s a real Israelite, and he’s not a bit tricky.” Philip is puzzled, because it seems like an odd thing for Jesus to say-- but *Nathanael*, now Nathanael is really startled. Jesus has his full attention. “It must be some kind of weird coincidence,” thinks Nathanael; he almost doesn’t dare to ask: “*How do you know who I am?*”

Jesus replies, smiling (did he know that Nathanael had ridiculed his home town?) “I saw you. Earlier, sitting under that fig tree over there, studying. You were reading from Genesis, weren’t you, about Jacob, about how he tricked his father Isaac and his brother Esau, and then his father-in-law too. You were reading about Jacob’s ladder, reaching right into heaven in Jacob’s dream. That’s what you were doing; right?”

Nathanael is impressed. Jesus however, is just getting started. “You ain’t seen *nothing* yet.” Referring back to the Jacob’s ladder story, Jesus says, I am not just some wonder worker. *I am that ladder* that Jacob dreamt about. I am the bridge between earth and heaven. You will see much greater things—and these things will also be an invitation to “Come and See,” and having seen, to believe. And then to “Go and Tell” others about the powerful promises of God’s healing and gracious love, alive in the person of Jesus.

The first of these “greater things” happened right away after this lesson--the miracle at the wedding in Cana, turning water into wine. But the *greatest* of the greater things, the one toward which Jesus’ whole mission points, is a love stronger than death, even willing to take up the cross for our sake.

We too have been called to “Come and See,” to believe and to “Go and Tell.” This involves an on-going and everyday struggle, a striving to grow in our faith-life amid the distractions and temptations of a world that works against God’s will. The disciple-life doesn’t entirely do away with our doubts: “Can anything good come out of little Trinity; can anything good come out of Vigo County; can anything good come out of me?”

Can anything good come out of trying to follow this Jesus, who keeps insisting that even the showy signs are not being done to dazzle for their own sake, but only that you may believe he was “lifted up” on the cross for our sake? That we may learn to trust the Jesus who invites us to “*Come and See*,” and then encourages us to keep growing into a faith that relies on what God promises and not on the confusing and depressing realities around us. To trust, to wait and watch and listen for God even when that feels almost impossible.

It is so easy to lose track of the Call of God. Many things can take us away from it, if we allow them to. In 1949 William L. Sperry wrote a book entitled “Jesus Then and Now”. Someone ordered it in a store, but gave the title as “Jesus Now and Then.” Hmm. I expect this is often precisely our problem.

Every Call from God comes to us person-to-person. Of course, it may well come through someone else’s words or encouragement, but it is God who addresses each of us, and it is God to whom we answer.

Some folks respond to the Call by putting God on hold. Have you ever been put on hold, listening to annoying elevator music when you have business that you want to get done? Maybe God feels that way when we figure we can wait to respond.

Others use call-waiting and take other calls first--our jobs, our vacations, our comfort level, peer pressure, the urge to commune with St. Mattress on a cold Sunday morning. Why is it that folks can get a child to sports practice or show up on the first green early in the morning, but can't seem to make it on Sunday morning? Why is it that we find the time and money for our agendas and our gadgets, yet there seems to never quite enough for God and our neighbors? There are a million competitors for our time, talents, and money. Will we take those other calls and put God on call-waiting?

Then there are those who try to return the Call collect--making God PAY for the Call. God's Call comes to us out of God's generous grace. If our response has strings attached-- if the gift of ourselves to God is less than grateful and seldom joyful--then we have a ways to go in our growth in living out God's grace

When God's Call comes, we may want to say, "*Here Am I, send someone else.*" We may assist God, or we may resist God. We assist God when we "Go and Tell;" when we allow God to shape our lives into a "Show and Tell" of the power of God's love in Jesus Christ at work among us. If we pay attention to the people around us, we discover that there is a great emptiness in many people's lives. They long for an authentic spiritual connection. Many lack direction for their lives and even question the purpose of their existence. Some are lonely and need friends. God is calling us to help others encounter this God who loved us enough to become one of us; called to invite others to come and see Jesus, who died on the cross, who rose again, and raises us to new life.

So, we pray: Lord, give us the courage to follow the Call to "Come and See," the faith to trust that you will show us your "*greater things*," and the grace to "Go and Tell" the good news to our friends and neighbors through our words and through our lives. Let us be your faithful and effective disciples for this day, that our hands and feet may be Your hands and feet, at work loving your world.