

Sunday Sermon - 17.01.21
Delivered by Rev'd Stephen Monsiegnur
2nd Sunday after Epiphany

Gospel of John 1.43-51

43 The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, 'Follow me.' 44 Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. 45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' 46 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked. 'Come and see,' said Philip. 47 When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, 'Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.' 48 'How do you know me?' Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, 'I saw you while you were still under the fig-tree before Philip called you.' 49 Then Nathanael declared, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.' 50 Jesus said, 'You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig-tree. You will see greater things than that.' 51 He then added, 'Very truly I tell you, you will see "heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on" the Son of Man.'

Summary: Each of us has been called by God to fulfil a purpose in this life. Understanding and responding to this call requires effort on our part. The process can be divided into 3 steps - Discovery, Decision, Action. How do we know Gods call and what is our commitment to the process?

In her book, A Man Called Peter, Catherine Marshall tells how her late preacher-husband felt a sense of destiny, a sense of call in his life.

Marshall explains; One dark night, Peter, then a young man, decided to take a Shortcut across the Scottish moors. He knew there was a deep deserted limestone quarry in that area, but he was confident that even in the dark he could avoid it. Suddenly, he heard someone call, "Peter." There was great urgency in the voice. Peter stopped and responded: "Yes, who is it? What do you want?" There was no answer. He walked a few more steps and then heard the voice calling more urgently "Peter!"

He then he stumbled falling on his knees. Putting out his hand to catch himself, he found nothing there. He was at the very edge of the abandoned stone quarry. Just one more step would have meant certain death."

There was never any doubt in Peter Marshall's mind the source of that voice.

He felt that God must have some great purpose for his life to have intervened so specifically. The calling that night confirmed for Peter Marshall that he was clearly being called by God.

Each of us has been called by God to fulfil a purpose, to fulfil a spiritual calling in this life. We are called to become a part of the Masters plan. Today's readings speak to this. Samuel in the O.T.; Philip and Nathanael in the N.T. were each called by God, and in turn they responded effectively.

This calling, this process can be divided into 4 steps:

First discovery,

Second decision,

Third action, and

Forth reflection.

Throughout my nursing career these steps were the concrete on which my practice was based. Whether we are problem solving or realizing an opportunity, the degree to which we follow this process is the basis upon which any outcome is determined.

So how do these steps apply to us as Christians?

Consider Samuel.

Samuel heard someone repeatedly calling out to him and each time he was convinced it was Eli, but with Eli's intervention Samuel finally realized it was God calling him. Samuel made a discovery.

Need and opportunity may present in many forms ways, for instance,

Eli was also being utilized by God for it was Eli knowing God's voice that gave Samuel insight. Philip was discovered by Jesus and Jesus also called him to follow.

, but it required Philip to find Nathanael and tell him about this Jesus, through this invitation Nathanael had the opportunity 'to come and see!'

In each case the initial calling always came from God.

The point is that God discovers us as we are and how we are when [He] calls, that discovery leads to the second step, the decision. While God acts first by making the opening call to each of us, too progress, we must decide to do so. We must decide to "Come and See".

Calling us to Come and See, Jesus is calling us not only to salvation but into relationship; we are called to make every day of our lives a walk in his will. The task is not guaranteed to be easy in fact it is more likely to prove challenging, but Jesus promises to share the load. For a Christian, faith is not spelled F-A-I-T-H it is spelled R-I-S-K, because after-all if something is not a Risk, then it really does not require faith.

Philip in our Gospel reading made a decision to follow Jesus call.

Samuel also discovering it was God calling, answered famously with, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

We must ask ourselves as a community and as individuals; what is the measure of our response, our decision to that Calling? Sitting here indicates you have heard the call, so what will be your decision?

Some liken these times of discovery to that of 'tire-kickers' or 'window shoppers'. Those people who when shopping, will discover many options, kicking a few tyres in the car yard, fidget with stock in the store, but never actually committing to a purchase.

There are many tire-kickers in life who regarding Gods call, at times visit a church; they see and hear; even occasionally they are moved by something in the service, but they never fully commit, deciding to act on it. They tread water.

This indecisiveness or apathy is dangerous because not responding with purpose is a decision unto itself can lead to missed opportunity or worse be dangerous as our relationship with God may simply wither to naught. How we respond is a signal of our spiritual maturity.

In calling us into relationship, Jesus is calling us into greater spiritual maturity. Accepting the call, deciding to act creates purpose that leads to action in your faith and spiritual life. As you pass from one new beginning to another, you realize a greater dimension to your life and in your relationship with your Lord. You begin to trust God with your life.

2020 was a year that forced all of us to reconsider the many aspects of our lives and the life of our parish. We were forced to change plans, routines and so on. Now, we can look back at these events as negatives, cost that have hindered our progression, or we can listen, hear God's call to us and recognize the opportunities that have been created as a result of events of 2020.

Most of us have learned at least one new I.T. skill, in my case many. We have experienced new ways of engaging in worship that would simply have not occurred such as our outdoor service at Christmas Eve. I could go on and on. In short we are being called to be braver than we have been, to be stronger than we have been and to be more adventurous than ever before.

Through todays readings we hear that God desperately wants to work with us, calling us again and again until we answer. God knows us better than we know ourselves and even in light of our short comings will not give up on us, but in fact equip us with the tools we need for the mission we are called to attend.

Where do you see the Parish of St Thomas in the future? This is the call I hear, to refocus on our mission, not to tread water by being the same as we have always been, but to explore new opportunities, to experiment with different styles of worship that may lead to others hearing God call to them

Do we trust enough in our God to let go of ourselves, to surrender ourselves into the hands of Jesus?

Can we be more than tire kickers and window shoppers?

I believe with Faith in God's promise to us. Faith which allows us to develop a deeper and richer relationship with God. Faith that transforms us to the image of the one we call Lord, we can.

The Scriptures are clear Christian Faith is an active Faith, an action Faith. It is not a stagnate Faith, rather it is a Faith that requires us to do something. Where are you in your response to the Lords calling?

Samuel and Philip put their decision of faith into action.

They put feet to their Faith.

They put commitment to their conviction.

Samuel proclaimed to the Lord "Speak for your servant is listening".

Philip asked Nathanael to "Come and see". Nathanael responding to the opportunity realized through Phillip's invitation declares "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (John 1:49)

Both trusted, both were people of Faith. This faith was portrayed in definitive action which lead to the realization of transforming power and growth in the mission of God.

To receive this transforming power, we must open ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If we are to succeed, we must learn to walk in Faith. We need to exercise our Faith through Action. Results may take time and variations in the way things are done may be necessary, but commitment to the mission bolstered through faith will see success. That is, our faith becomes stronger, it becomes mature.

In summary, our actions proclaim our Faith, who we really are and as we begin 2021 let it be time to allow Jesus to be not only your Saviour, but to be your Lord. To be the one in whose footsteps we walk. By yielding to God's Calling to yield to his Lordship will move us to put feet to our Faith. Find Time to be with Christ and when you come into his presence, when you begin to hear his voice, when you begin to hear his calling; Then Humble yourself as the Prophet Samuel who simply said; "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Amen.