

[Readings: 1 Samuel 3:3b-10, 19; Ps. 40; 1 Cor 6:13c-15a, 17-20; John 1:35-42]

There are all kinds of calls going on in the readings today -- and all kinds of people who respond in different ways. Sometimes people are being called clearly, sometimes not. In one case, God is doing the calling; in another, someone is calling on God's behalf. And in between the callers and receivers are people like you and me -- intermediaries -- who act either as a clear conduit or as a telephone operator helping customers with a call.

How am I like Samuel? Am I unsure of something in my life right now but unclear on which way God is telling me to go? Besides God's voice, what other "voices" are competing for my attention as I make decisions -- voices that represent the expectations of parish, family, and friends? Voices from my past? Voices of guilt, fear, or selfishness?

Today's scripture passages involve two fateful introductions: First Samuel, a future prophet, meets the one true God whom he will serve his whole life. And then two disciples of John the Baptist have their attention directed toward an obscure local teacher whom their own famed teacher terms "the Lamb of God."

An introduction is not all there is to these encounters. Once an introduction is made, it's up to the parties involved to follow through to real relationship. Though just a boy, Samuel takes direction from the old priest thoughtfully. The voice is strange to him, yet he offers to listen, to pay attention --the technical word here is to obey. Because he's so willing to attend to God the stranger, Samuel will foster a lifelong relationship with God who is Lord, guide, and companion. As a result, Samuel becomes the most effective judge who ever exercised leadership in Israel.

The disciples who depart from John and approach Jesus make the same choice. They ask where this teacher is staying in a bid to join his school wherever it gathers. One of my favorite verses in the Gospel involves a question and an answer: "Rabbi -- where are you staying?" "Come, and you will see." Where is Jesus "staying" in YOUR life? Is He a welcome guest? Are you bold enough, courageous enough to "come and see" what Jesus has in mind for YOU?

“Stay” can also mean “live” and “abide.” Where does Jesus stay, live, and abide, in your life? And a follow-up question: Is there a “right time” to be called by God? Yes, there is, and the time is right now! Regardless of who you are, where you’ve been, or where you are going, God calls you in this very moment.

What does it mean to be called by God? It means that God desires to connect personally with each and every one of us and that our whole life is a response to God. We commit ourselves to a life relationship with a person, a family, or a community, do we not? We seek education in order to prepare ourselves for a certain form of service in the world, do we not? We build a career using the gifts and talents we have been given. In our work, at school, in our family, in our relationships. If they lead us toward God, they are of the Holy One. If they lead us away from God, they are of the Evil One. And we freely choose which One we are going to follow and serve!

In these and other ways we give our lives to God. There are also smaller but no less significant choices we make day-to-day in response to God’s call: a kind word to a colleague, an opportunity to enjoy the rain (but NOT the snow when it comes with ice!), an extra effort to make a good project great. The key is to be open to God’s invitation to connect with God here and now. In this way, we open ourselves to think, feel, and act from a graced place.

It can be helpful to have a spiritual friend or mentor with whom you can talk about calling and also to read the stories of how others have been called by reading the lives of the saints. Parker Palmer says that a vocation to the single life, the married life, the ordained life, the religious life, doesn’t come from our own person willfulness. It comes from listening. I must listen to and reflect upon the experiences of my life and try to understand what it is truly about. Or else my life will never represent anything real in the world, no matter how earnest my expectations. “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.” “Glorify the Lord in your body.” “Rabbi, where are you staying? Where do you live? Where do you abide?” “Come, and you will see.” AMEN!