

John 1:43-51 and 1 Samuel 3:1-10 [11-20]

The pericope, that is the verses chosen for this morning, from both the Old Testament reading from 1st Samuel and the Gospel reading from John speak to us about hearing a call from God. The first happened when people hadn't heard from God in a very long time, and the same can be said about the second. But there are differences, just as there are differences in how people today hear God's call.

The times of Samuel's call were much like what we are experiencing today. The people didn't care about the laws of God, even the king's sons were ignoring what was right in the eyes of God. That may not seem important in today's world, but in the time of Samuel and Eli, the king was God's servant and the one who was to keep God's people following the law. Instead the king told people whatever it took to make them happy. I'm sure you can think of some televangelists of today's time that do just that while they are sitting in the midst of earthly luxury. Except, Eli wanted to hear what God said to Samuel, he wanted to hear it, good or bad. I'm not sure that is the same in today's world.

When Jesus called his disciples to follow him it was a call to follow God on earth. The disciples didn't realize the full extent of what following Jesus would lead to, they just knew they were following in the right direction.

This particular passage, telling of the disciples who chose to follow Jesus includes Philip and Nathaniel, whom we later know as Bartholomew. Phillip answered Jesus' invitation to follow him and didn't stop there. He went and found his friend Nathaniel who was sitting under the fig tree. We have no idea what Nathaniel was doing as he was sitting there, but chances are it may not have been something to be proud of. We can infer this because Jesus' greeting to him was interesting, most likely a little sarcastic, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" Then, when Jesus said to him, "I saw you under the fig tree before Phillip called you," Nathaniel immediately decided that Jesus was someone whom he could trust to follow, he felt immediate acceptance by Jesus.

We know that God sees everything and knows everything about what we are doing, and still loves and welcomes us to repentance and a relationship. The "come and see" invitation from Phillip to Nathaniel is a guide to our behavior now. "Come and see what God is doing at Immanuel Lutheran" is a good way to invite your friends to become a part of the kingdom of God on earth.

God is calling people to follow Jesus, to live the life that follows the narrow road with joy. The Daily Grace devotion published by the Women of ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) had a post by an anonymous writer that told of attending her first meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous, which she dreaded until the moment of introducing herself. When she said, "Hi, my name is...and I'm an alcoholic," there was an outpouring of love from the people in the room. She said that is when she felt God's unconditional love for the first time, and understood that the forgiveness revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was for real. She said, and I quote, "I never had a feeling quite like this. It felt, for the first time, like I was being me in my entirety without the fear that anyone would find out who I really was or how I used and abused alcohol. These people already knew, and they accepted me anyway – just as God has done." (This message is excerpted from "Reformed" by Anonymous in the January/February 2017 Gather magazine.) I've heard from other sources that being accepted by AA is easier than being accepted in a church. I'm not quite sure why some

church people judge others so harshly when God has forgiven their sins and showed them love and acceptance as shown in today's gospel reading about Phillip calling Nathaniel to "come and see", and his total acceptance by Jesus.

Sometimes our call to follow Jesus is outside our profession, perhaps it is ministry by volunteering at a food bank, or teaching people to read, teaching a life skills class, or assisting in the worship service. Other times it becomes our life's occupation. I don't know if you've ever heard about how I heard God's call into ministry... the second time. The first time was just a feeling I had when I was taking confirmation classes, a feeling that I should be devoting my life to doing something for God. The only option open for me at that time was to be a deaconess which meant if I wanted to be married, I would need to leave diaconal ministry. At that young age it was a choice that was too difficult for me to make. So I went on my way and lived my life. Then, in my late 20s I began attending a church that had a female pastor, because they had a female pastor, and my cousin had invited me to go there. I became very involved with the ministry of the church, attending Bible studies, teaching Sunday school, serving on committees, directing the program that involved the girls from Florence Crittendon Center, and singing in the choir.

One night I woke up from a sound sleep, and out of the darkness I heard a voice say, "Feed my sheep." Not being totally awake I said, "Huh?" Again, the voice said, "Feed my sheep." I was a bit startled, and I said, "What?" Again, "Feed my sheep." To which I replied, "Oh, Ok," somehow understanding it was a call from God to go into ministry. It took me a while to get there, but eventually I was assigned my first church while I was finishing my undergrad degree, then I went off to seminary where I worked closely with a church, then I came back to full time ministry in Western PA, and now, retired, I am grateful to be serving God in ministry with you here at Immanuel.

As we move further into this new year lets try to discover and practice new ways of responding to God's call to bring others into the fold of unconditional love found through Jesus Christ. Let's extend the invitation, "Come and see." Let's say a simple, "It's nice to see you today," which goes a long way to making a person feel welcome. Let's share a warm smile. Let's speak kindly of and to one another. We are very generous people when we hear of a worthy cause, let's stretch that generosity to include giving of our time and talents to broaden our ministry, even if that ministry doesn't bring people into our church but allows us to be Jesus to the world, drawing them closer to God.

Because drawing people closer to God without expecting anything in return other than letting them know God is love is what it is all about. That is why God called Samuel to speak to Eli. That is why Jesus called his disciples; it's all about helping to bring people into a closer relationship with God. We are able to do that because we have known the unconditional love of God shown to us through Jesus Christ who gave of himself so that we can be free from sin and live eternally.

All glory be to God!