

Sermon Epiphany 2b 2018: Called by God to Privilege or Responsibility

Introduction: God Calls Us, But to What?

One of the most compelling aspects of the Christian life;

One of the most amazing characteristics of being a follower of Jesus Christ

Beyond the promise of the forgiveness of our sins and life after death;

Is that God calls people like you and me;

Is that God calls people like you and me to a living relationship with Him,

And calls us to do His bidding, to do His will in our lives and for the life of the world.

I always think of this notion of God's interest and God's call on our lives

As God at His best: Creator and Sustainer and Redeemer of all that is,

Interested and involved in your life and in my life;

Interested enough to take the risk to call us,

To choose us to do His will and to make His glory and presence known.

It's astounding to me at so many levels;

Astounding that God would take an interest in you and me at all

Much less call us to tasks and a life that require the best we have to give.

But throughout the Bible and throughout the life of the Church, even to our own day,

God has called people and continues to call people

To give us life with Him and to give us important work to do:

From Adam and Eve to Abraham and Sarah,

From little, twelve-year old Samuel in the reading this morning,

To grown men like Peter and Andrew and Philip and Nathanael

In this morning's Gospel,

To all of us gathered here this morning.

God calls people like us to important tasks;

Whatever our age, whatever our gifts and abilities, whatever our interests;

Whatever weaknesses, shortcomings or doubts we may have, God calls us.

God calls us and sets us on a pathway that gives us a life that is far greater,
That is far more interesting and challenging than any other life there is;
But with this call comes a responsibility on our part to respond,
To do what God has called us to do in our every day lives
And in the world around us.

God is Calling You

Too many of us, miss the call of God on our lives;
We miss this call of the Christian life and go about our lives as if God doesn't matter
Or we miss the call because we believe that He hasn't really called us.

At one level that's an intellectual challenge for some of us;
We may not quite buy into the concept of God
Or we can't accept that God is really that interested in our lives
And certainly not interested enough to call us personally.

Okay; but the Biblical record and your own experience suggest otherwise;
I tried to count all the people God calls in the Bible this week
And stopped when I topped 100 and wasn't even through the Old Testament.

But outside of the Bible and outside of Church, think of the people in your own life:
A parent, a friend, a neighbor who seems to be responding to a power
And a call to do good and to do for others that is obviously beyond themselves;
A calling that gives them life and in turn gives life to you and to others.

This weekend we are honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.;

And the vision God gave him of a Untied States where all are treated as equals;
Where all persons have an opportunity to become who God made them to be;
A nation where the color of our skin means nothing compared to
The depth and the love of our hearts.

As the son of a pastor, you'd think that his calling was so obvious, but it wasn't;
He wanted to be a lawyer and then a doctor; he had no plans to follow his pastor father;
But the moment he got talked into giving a sermon, he felt a calling;
And his answer and tireless efforts for racial equality and the soul of our nation;
Began to change how we think about who we are and what we're about
And Dr. King's vision continues today.

No, if you're having trouble with the concept of God's call on your life;
It's much more likely that you don't want to hear God's call;
And much more likely that you don't want to open your life to the changes
That you're probably going to have to make in the use of your time,
In the use of your money, and in the way you treat those around you.

But make no mistake, God is calling you and me;
And even though we'll face changes in the way we live our lives,
The change is always for the good of our lives
And for good of the lives of those around us. Always.

God's Call is not a Call to Privilege

Others of us, who are more comfortable with the idea that God's called us;
Mistake the purpose of our call with the privilege of being called;
And end up responding half-heartedly, if we respond at all.

We accept the belief that God is interested enough to call us to a living relationship,
But instead of responding in some tangible ways; we sit back as if it's our privilege;
As if it's something we deserve for our own enjoyment
And for the enjoyment of those close to us.

It probably felt like a huge privilege for little Samuel to be called by the voice of God;
God's word had been silent for a long time at this point in the history of the Jews,
And few of those called ever heard the audible voice of God,
As Samuel did as a 12 year old and throughout his life.

And the same can be said for the men and women and boys and girls
Who actually heard Jesus' voice calling them to follow Him,
What a privilege to be called personally by the Son of God
To this life with God and to a higher purpose in living.

But it never stops there;
God's call always comes with responsibility, with a task, with a commission;
One that Samuel responded to all the days of His life;
And one that Jesus' first followers heard and accepted,
Not as a privilege only, but as a responsibility;
And because they did, the world has never been the same.

More than ten years ago when we were building the new Chapel, yes it's been over 10 yrs
I remembered worrying and praying about whether we were building
For our convenience, so that there was more room for us on Sundays
And especially on Christmas and Easter;
Or whether we were truly answering God's call
And taking up the responsibility that always comes with a calling;
Including welcoming others into our community.

If it was just for ourselves alone then we would have been in for some real trouble;
Because God's call, privilege that it is, always comes with responsibility;
And our responsibility once we moved into the larger space,
Would be to pay even closer attention to our mission
So that we and others may come to know God in Jesus Christ here
And so that we and others can make Christ known from here;

Thankfully, though not perfectly, we continue to take up the important responsibilities
In the mission God has called us to;
We're using the privilege of this magnificent space in response to God's call.

A Call and a Responsibility

Still others of us miss God's call on our lives because we've set that call aside;

Like the Christians in the Church in Corinth Paul is writing to this morning;

People who have answered the call to follow Christ;

But have joined themselves to things other than God;

People who have fallen away from a call they heard

And now are being called to return.

They and we are being called to a life lived with and for God;

And a life that honors God by the way we love and care for other people;

Including how we care for ourselves;

That may be you this morning and God is calling you today to answer Him again.

The scripture readings for this morning proclaim that God calls people like you and me

Calls us to a life with Him and to a life in the world that makes a difference;

It's God at His best.

He stands at our side this morning calling us, inviting us, beckoning us

To a way of living that will call forth the best in us;

He is waiting for us to respond and to take up our responsibilities

As His children, as His ambassadors in the world.

There's a powerful image of God calling that I think of often;

It's an image that's been drawn and painted many times through the centuries;

It's based on Jesus' own words when He says, "See, I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in." (Rev. 3:20)

Jesus is always shown standing at the door, holding a lantern in His hand, calling;

This is pretty powerful stuff on its own, but in all the paintings and drawings

There's a little detail that's easy to miss:

There's no handle on Jesus' side of the door – no door knob.

When we hear God's call, we have to open the door and allow God in;
God will not force His way into our lives or overpower us in any way;
It is our choice to accept God's call and to take up the life;
And the way of life that He is calling each us to live.

The one gentle enough to allow us to open the door to Him
Will also be gentle enough to mold you and shape you for the life
He is calling you to live.

And so this morning, I invite you to remember that God is calling you and me
Calls us to a life that is truly life;
Calling you to a life of important tasks and responsibilities
Far greater than the lives we are now living.

He calls us just as we are and when we answer God's call;
He sends the Holy Spirit to empower and direct our lives for God's purposes;
Listen, He's calling you and me today.

Amen.