

The Vine at Home
Second Sunday of Ordinary Time – Year B
17th January 2021

Call to worship

You have called us here, O God,
And we have come, to worship, to pray, to praise and to reflect.
You have called us here, O God,
And you will call us on, into the actions and activities of this week.
Give us your grace, your wisdom, and your strength, to know the tasks that are ours to do,
today and in the coming days. Amen.¹

Hymn: 82 STF – O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder

Opening Prayers

As we prepare for worship, O Lord, we hold the stillness.

Let us be still, and be here.
Let us be quiet, and be present.
Let go of the past.
Forget about the future.
And just be here. Just for a minute or two.
Right now...

[Hold a moment of silence – for at least a minute]

In the stillness, in the silence, in the moments of self-doubt and self-pity, we know you close to us – by some mystery.

Come close, forgiving and accepting God, today – and accept us by your grace.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

Readings: 1 Samuel 3:1-10 - Samuel's Calling and Prophetic Activity

3 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

2 At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; **3** the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. **4** Then the Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!"^[a] and he said, "Here I am!" **5** and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. **6** The Lord called

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Additional prayers by Tim Baker

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again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." **7** Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. **8** The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. **9** Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

10 Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."³

John 1:43-51 - Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." **44** Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. **45** Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." **46** Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." **47** When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" **48** Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." **49** Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" **50** Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." **51** And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you,^[a] you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."⁴

Reflections on the readings

'How do you know me?'

Nathaniel's question of Jesus is incredulous. He's put-out, taken off-guard, disarmed. How do you know me? What do you know about me? What do you want with me?

Nathaniel's defence mechanisms kick-in, the same way mine do when I realise the person I've just opened the front door to is trying to sell me something, or when I discover the Facebook advert I was about to click on was specifically designed to make me do just that... We don't like it when people invade our personal space, or appear to know something about us that we don't think they should.

Most of us like to just 'mind our own business, thank you very much'.

But that's not really how our relationship with God works, is it? Our human relationships are not great comparisons for what it is like to come to know God more, to be immersed in the way of the divine. Often people have used marriage as a kind of example – but we all know that neither of the parties in a marriage is perfect, so it can't be a fair reflection of our relationship with God. Sometimes we hear about the 'love of a Father' or the 'all-Parent'. This perhaps helps some of us, but God is so much more loving, so much more generous than our earthly parents could ever be, and knows us more deeply.

^{3,4} Bible Text is from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved

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God knows so much of us, all of us, 'every hair on our head' as is often quoted. But what do we know of the divine? That, I believe, is why God calls us. God is relationship, God is invitation. God desires us to be closer to the divine spirit that flows through all things.

I want to just touch on three ways that God calls us:

1) All callings include that sense of deepening relationship with the divine. God's calling to us may be specific, but it is also an invitation to be more in tune with the Spirit of God, to be more in line with the love that God has for the whole of creation.

God's call echoes that of Aslan in the final chapter of C. S. Lewis' Narnia series: 'come further up and come further in'. As the characters from the series enter heaven – they are invited further and further into the love of God. So are we.

2) Many people experience a sense of calling to a specific task or vocation: this happens in myriad different ways, and there is no blueprint for what a calling has to look like. Some people feel the clear sense of call to pursue ordained ministry, others to follow a particular career path or to lay down a job in order to follow a specific direction. We see something of this kind of call in our Old Testament reading today: God knows Samuel by name, calls him by name, and here – even as a young boy – begins his vocation as one of the leading prophets of the Old Testament.

Have you ever had an experience like this? Might God be calling you to something specific right now? To what extent are you listening for the prompts (like Samuel), or are you assuming that 'this would never happen to you' (like Eli appears to assume for the first few verses of today's reading). Alternatively, perhaps you are actively running away, like Jonah?

3) Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly of all, God calls us to be 'fully ourselves'. This principal is at the heart of much of the writing and reflection done by Richard Rohr – who leads the Centre for Action and Contemplation in the USA. His work has focused on inviting us all to recognise the Christ within us, and to accept ourselves for who we are. Rohr warns us against the self-destructive, self-critical voices of human nature (they are not 'of God') and invites us to see ourselves as 'fearfully and wonderfully made' as the Psalmist puts it.

Today – perhaps you are just being called to be you.

To be authentically, totally, and divinely you. That doesn't mean you have to be like anyone else, it just means you have to listen out for the Christ within you.

This is what Nathaniel experiences in the story from the Gospels – Jesus knows him. Jesus knows him even before they met. The Christ-energy within Nathaniel calls out to the Christ-energy that is Jesus, and there is a connection. Nathaniel is offended at first, but within seconds is declaring "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."

The God who made the mountains and the stars is calling you.

Desiring you.

Hoping for relationship with you.

And has a plan for you – a plan designed just for you.

Are you going to take the next step today towards seeing that plan fulfilled? Are you going to listen for the still small voice, calling your name?

It takes great awareness and an openness to the ways of the Spirit to sense God's promptings on our lives, but trust me – they are there. Can we still the mindless chatter of our everyday lives, and really listen?

There, listen...the divine is calling your name.... Amen.⁵

Prayers of intercession

[You may wish to light a candle and place a small mirror beside it, so that it reflects the candle flame.]

Creator God, we bring ourselves into your holy presence and give you our full attention. We praise you for your greatness, your awesome power, your majesty and beauty that we see mirrored in the world around us. We treasure each opportunity to discover more of you in times of prayer.

Jesus, Son of God, you greet us as individuals who are intimately known by you. For you know our name, our personality, our potential for good and for evil. We long to reflect your goodness in our lives. We listen for your word of forgiveness, comfort and challenge.

Holy Spirit of God, you urge us to share our faith with others, through acts of kindness, words of truth and commitment to your call. Please show us where there is particular need in our local community, and help us to respond with love and generosity, sensitivity and wisdom, courage and perseverance.

Loving God, the world is crying out for justice, renewal and peace. We call to mind those parts of the world that are in pain and offer them into your loving care. We long that you will show us how to reflect your message of truth, hope and love in all creation.

In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.⁶

Hymn: 728 STF – O God, you search me and you know me

Blessing

You have called us here, O God,
And now you call us out, you call us on, you call us forwards.
As we go from here, O God,
We know your Spirit goes before us.
Guide us, by that Spirit, to know your voice when you call, to follow in your way, and to bring your Kingdom closer, today. Amen.⁷

⁵ Reflection written by Tim Baker

⁶ Prayers of intercession written by Alison Judd

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker