

Vocation

There was a cartoon that amused me much because it described my own experience as a homeowner. It showed a fellow trying to relax of a summer day on a lawn chair in front of his house while all around him the rain gutters were saying, "Clean me" and the lawn kept saying "Cut me" and the windows kept saying "Wash me" and his inside office space kept saying, "Tidy me up" and so on and so on. In other words he couldn't really relax. Too many things were being called to his attention.

It reminds me (but in no irritating way) of my earlier years spent in graduate biblical studies. We were doing the Gospel of Mark (this year's favored Gospel). It wasn't long before I found that Mark (as well as the other Gospels) is full of what the textbooks named "Call" stories. For instance in Mark's very first chapter we hear Jesus calling Peter, Andrew and then James and John to "Follow me."

Then in the very next chapter it's Levi sitting at the customs post whom Jesus calls to follow him. Indeed he later speaks of his behavior as "sowing the word", a summons to which some respond and others do not. Then there is that parable in Luke where (even as Jesus calls actual individuals) a man invites people to a great dinner, saying, "Come, everything is ready" – and the response is "I have purchased a field and must examine it" or "I have purchased five yoke of oxen and need to evaluate them" or "I have just been married and so cannot come."

Today's readings continue this theme – in the first reading we hear of the nighttime call of the boy Samuel who finally says, "Speak, Lord, for I'm listening" and in the Gospel of the spell Jesus casts on his early apostles who can't resist their attraction to his mysterious person.

And of course in the Old Testament there are so many calls from out of seemingly nowhere summoning people to "go to the undefined destination I have reserved for you" – or those wonderful passages that tell of God's calling the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel to stir up his people – with Jeremiah protesting: "Ah, Lord God! I do not know how to speak. I am too young." To which God says in effect: "Don't worry. I'll take care of that."

So why this theme throughout the Bible? It seems a kind of story the Bible especially wants to emphasize. It suggests that like these characters in Scripture we each have a destiny not just to live out our usual biological life cycle but to reach beyond somehow – to things that tease us to keep growing until we are truly *human* beings and not just census statistics or ideologues.

One of my favorite philosophers puts it more or less this way: that it is the Source of our very existence (whom we call God) who *hails* us, i.e. calls us from afar TO BE (contrary to Hamlet's "Not to be"). And as believers we would add: TO BE in the way Christ IS – full of grace.

So read yourself into the Samuel story and catch the signals Jesus sends out to Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathaniel. Subject yourself to the same interest they have in where he lives and how he lives - to his seductive invitation: "Come, and see."

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