

# Vocation

I want to talk to you about vocation, and at the same time, locate our conversation in scripture, I have read 1 Samuel 3, and John 1:43-51 These references talk of the calling Samuel and the calling of the disciples by Jesus.

I would describe these times in the lives of people, as the moments of being called. In these moments, people set out to become what they were meant to be. If it is a person's destiny, to be called by God, then these are the moments in which one experiences a kind of awakening. Sometimes a person may have dreamed their way towards fulfilment in the manner of Pinocchio who began as a wooden marionette and reached fulfilment as a real boy.

Perhaps a person's awakening is very like the story of Maria, whose Christmas gift of a nut cracker, becomes a Cinderella dream when the nutcracker becomes a real prince.

For me personally, at the age of eight, I became aware of the fact that one day, I would be a cleric. At the time, and for many years hence, I didn't have the words to express that feeling, but I knew a change was somewhere ahead for me and that it involved the church. In my teenage years I was exposed to ministry. Eventually, as an adult the bishop told me to go home; pack my bag; and head for the seminary in Auckland.

Now I have said that my call was to ordination, but let me say at once, that ordination is not the only calling. Paul in his first letter to the Church in Corinth comes to say....

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.<sup>1</sup>

Let me be clear about what I am saying today in this time of conversation with you.

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<sup>1</sup> The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL 2016) 1 Co 12:4-11.

The focus for my comments, is this faith community. In that sense, what I have to say is far from complete. A call from God is absolutely not limited one having to be a member of this or any faith community. I am also using the word 'become' as a form of expression for one's embracing of their destiny. To become, in this sense, is to embrace the destiny that God has in store for you. Another way of expressing this is to simply be; as in Shakespeare's soliloquy; to be or not to be.

Each of us will have these dreams or awakenings in which we realise that something is tugging at us. Our ultimate fulfilment; Our becoming rests on the echoing call from the faith community. If we succeed in becoming, our lives will be transformed forever.

It is also important to note that this is not an abstract hope or possibility. Given the right environment and the courage to dream, all of us have an opportunity to seize a moment of gestalt and become something more. In it's fullest sense, this is our vocation.

Neither do I wish to paint a garish background like the one that echos the Prince of Denmark and his timeless soliloquy, "To be or not to be"

No, I want to paint an image which contrasts that which God calls us to be, with the emptiness of turning aside when we sense God's call upon our being.

To do this I want to compare images from our present story of God in this place. We have been through a lock-down but for me, remarkable things have sprung from our quarantine. The shift to technologies like Zoom has opened the door to wonderful new opportunities. I sense we are on the cusp of growing into something much more than we have been. We have excellent leadership and there is a high sense of vibrancy in the air.

In the time of Samuel, visions were rare. It may be that visions in our faith community are not being articulated, but I sense their immanence. The lamp of God has not run dry of oil.

I am sure that when Samuel was woken by God, he would have had no idea that he was about to bring bad news to Eli. Neither could he have dreamed that one day he would anoint a King.

Young as he was, his training conditioned him to respond to what he heard. He then effectively received the affirming community echo from Eli and from there over the many following years, the Kingship movement in Israel set it's course.

Now, to draw some parallels within this faith community, Stuart does not sleep in this temple overnight, neither does Stuart have a twelve year old apprentice, also sleeping somewhere in the temple but to talk of parallels being detail perfect, misses the point.

I believe that it is entirely possible that there are folk within this faith community who are sensing a restlessness. That restlessness could well be a call from God. If there are some of you who feel that restlessness for some form of ministry, then it's time to talk to Stuart.

Now let's look for a moment at the calling of the disciples. If you have courage to engage with metaphors, you will find something quite new in the calling of the disciples.

A number of disciples were called, but one stands out as a symbol for a barely hidden truth. His name is Nathaniel.

The reason he stands out is that he is depicted as sitting under a fig tree. A conversation ensues, out of which comes the assertion that Nathaniel is already very well known by Jesus. To paraphrase the event, one could say of Nathaniel, that he said to Jesus in a rhetorically framed question; "Because I was sitting under a fig tree, you know all this about me?" This particular passage has engaged the minds of scholars and Bishops for a very long time. Saint Augustine, for instance, offered a metaphor on this in one of his sermons that are preserved for posterity.

He said;

WHAT we have heard said by the Lord Jesus Christ to Nathanael, if we understand it aright, does not concern him only. For our Lord Jesus saw the whole human race under the fig-tree. For in this place it is understood that by the fig-tree He signified sin<sup>2</sup>

It is important to say, that Saint Augustine's interpretation is not necessarily correct, but his use of metaphor shifts from factual to imaginative and opens wide another door that is crucial to our understanding of the calling. In the centuries since Augustine, scholars have regularly built their commentaries on his insight. For instance, if we nod approvingly to Augustine's statement; **For our Lord Jesus saw the whole human race under the fig-tree. For in this place it is understood that by the fig-tree He signified sin,** then we too, here and now, experience the same judgement.

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<sup>2</sup> AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, "Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament", Saint Augustin: Sermon on the Mount, Harmony of the Gospels, Homilies on the Gospels (ed. P. SCHAFF) (A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series; New York 1888) VI, 470.

Although Nathaniel would have felt unworthy to be called. Jesus made it clear to him that repentance brought him into the fold. His past was a thing of the past. Ahead of him lay the riches of salvation.

We find ourselves back with Eli and Samuel. The lamp of God (not yet out) is running low. The low light conceals some personal short-comings. In the fresh light of the new day, Eli accepts the terrible truth he already knows to be true.

Nathaniel, comes out from the shadow of the fig tree and is welcomed by Jesus.

And now the light is directed upon us.

If God is calling us, embrace Saint Augustine insight and know for sure, that God will wipe away all of your perceived blemishes and he will equip you for the service to which you are called. When God calls a faith community into being, He also equips it with all that needed for it to prosper and grow. The same equipping applies to individuals.

Would you join me in prayer by turning to the collect for today, on the front of the Fisherfolk.

Praise to you, God, for all your work among us.  
Yours is the vigour in creation,  
yours is the impulse in our new discoveries.  
Make us adventurous, yet reverent and hopeful  
in all we do.  
Hear this prayer for your love's sake.  
**Amen.**