

Epiphany 2

January 17, 2021

1 Samuel 3:1-10 Psalm 139

John 1:43-51

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Once upon a time, when I was a teenager, I wanted to be a veterinarian. James Herriott's book *All Creatures Great and Small* had not been published for long and it seemed that *everyone* was reading it and the two sequels. His descriptions of his life as a vet in the rolling hills of England sounded exciting and wonderful! (And yes, if you're a PBS viewer, the new series based on the books that just began on *Masterpiece* is what reminded me about it.)

Obviously, I'm not a vet! That's because two things happened: It dawned on me that there would be a lot of math and science involved--two subjects I didn't really like and wasn't all that good at; and my best friend at the time, Audrey, said in an off-hand way at church one night "I think you should be a pastor." What?!

At the time, women had only been ordained in the Lutheran church for 7 years. I had met only two women pastors in my life at that point. And yet, my friend's words planted a seed that slowly took root and gently pushed me in a direction that I had not imagined myself going.

I wonder--how did you come to be in the work you do or in the work you did? Maybe you are someone who had or will have several different careers in your lifetime; or maybe you found something and stayed with it or had to stay with it. We often talk about job and vocation as interchangeable definitions--think of 'vocational training' or 'vocational rehabilitation.' Or when we hear 'vocation,' what comes first to mind is a religious calling that comes to someone else and not to us.

In fact, the word does come from the Latin word *vocatio*, which means a call, or a summons. It didn't originally just refer to a call from God, but was adopted by the early Christian church, maybe as a response to Gospel passages like the one we heard today.

John's Gospel is moving quickly to Jesus' first miracle at the wedding in Cana. But first, disciples: Andrew, then his brother Peter; and today Philip and Nathanael. Many people have wondered over the centuries just what it was about Jesus that led people--both men and women--to leave what they had been doing behind and follow. Was it charisma? Some magnetic personality? In today's scripture it is just a simple invitation, isn't it: "Come and see. We've found the Messiah. Come and see."

At this point we could just say "And the rest is history." But it's not so simple. They couldn't see into the future. We know that disciples rejoiced, struggled, doubted, and even ran away scared when Jesus was arrested--after Jesus' resurrection some of them went back to fishing for awhile. Their response to being called by Christ was imperfect and very human, probably much like our own.

We Lutherans talk about being named Child of God and being called to follow Jesus in the waters of our baptism. This equality of call from the beginning of our lives is a unique heritage from Martin Luther. In medieval times, the church taught that certain callings in life were more holy than others. The priest or nun would have no problem securing a place in heaven, whereas a cobbler or farmer might because of their lowly vocation.

Luther adamantly rejected that hierarchy *because of our baptism into Christ*. The mother or father changing a diaper, the farmer plowing a field, the cobbler making shoes, the baker, were *all* living out their faith in whatever they did.

Sometimes we forget that legacy. I wonder--do you think that what you do or what you did in your work is somehow less 'holy' than the work of pastors or deacons, church musicians or the 12 disciples? Worse still, that your faith is not good enough or strong enough to justify thinking that you actually have been called by Christ? I hope not! As we heard in today's Psalm, we are each "fearfully and wonderfully made" and given abilities and talents by God who loves us. Our *vocation* is to live out that identity no matter what we do or where we are.

Let's just say that God has given you the gift of hospitality. Making others feel cared for, heard and welcomed is what brings you gladness and satisfaction. You could live out that gift as an auto mechanic, a teacher, a receptionist, or as a waiter. You live it out in your interactions even with people you don't know.

Or maybe you are a great organizer. You can live that out by keeping your family and their activities in order, or in politics. You can be the 'social director' for your friends, the community organizer in your neighborhood.

Or maybe you are an introvert. That's a gift, too; to be able to be quiet in a noisy world, to listen, to wonder, to pray, to be in tune to life in ways other people aren't. Or...well, you get it--as others have said, we don't have to stamp a cross on everything we do or everything we make in order to live our faith.

Very few of us will hear our name called in the night like Samuel did; or hear the spoken voice of Jesus say "follow me," yet each of us--you--are claimed in your baptismal waters and called to follow the Way of Jesus.

How will you live out that *vocation* today and tomorrow in your interactions with others, in your choices, in your care for creation, in the next thing you do?