

**On being called ..... ‘Come and see’.**

When I was first contemplating Reader training a friend stopped me in the street. ‘Do you feel called?’ she asked, ‘Do you feel it here?’ And she thumped her chest in roughly the place where her heart would be. Well to her disappointment, but hopefully not yours, I had to confess that I didn’t. In fact had I felt like that I would probably have also felt a need to run away as it would have been so out of character. But, of course, there were other factors including one of our then team vicars who was on my case, and ..... well the rest is history.

In today’s readings we hear of people being called in a number of ways. Samuel is called in the night. The passage makes it clear that this was a time when communication from God was unknown. It is not surprising then that he simply assumes that when he hears his name in the night it must be Eli calling him. But Eli does recognise the call and instructs his pupil on how to respond. ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening’.

In the gospel passage we hear of the calling of two of the disciples. Philip to whom Jesus says directly, ‘Follow me’, and Nathaniel taken by Philip to meet him. Previously in this chapter John has told us of Andrew, directed to Jesus by John the Baptist, of Peter, brought by Andrew. Jesus begins to assemble his band of disciples, called in ways varying from a direct invitation to a suggestion to, ‘Come and see’. Is this because Philip himself is struggling to find the words to tell his friend about the man he has found, or because anyone would be struggling to find those words?

And what were they being called to, this group of distinct but varied individuals? Peter always at the centre of the action, if sometimes embarrassing himself. James and John also centre stage, Andrew and Philip mentioned occasionally, and Judas Iscariot. At the point that they began to follow Jesus they had no idea of what was in store for them, no idea of what would be asked of them. What a contrast to the modern way in which we usually try to find out what is expected of us before we commit. In fact we may be suspicious of the person who doesn’t want to know.

One of the commentaries I read this week suggested that the reason why Philip was called directly by Jesus was because he was modest and unsure of himself and without a direct request he would have declined. It made the point that many people are frequently required to operate at or beyond the limits of their capabilities. I have certainly observed in church life over the years people being encouraged to do things they don’t feel confident about, although they usually emerge competent from their doubting. We have had helpers at the Journey to the stable who ‘couldn’t possibly do any acting’, but after circumstances have required them to take a walk on part have come to me asking for some lines to say. That can happen when you, ‘come and see’.

We are not so very different from that initial group of disciples. True none of us are commercial fishermen, but we include that same mix of optimism, anxiety, brashness and

humility. We have arrived here in different ways, along different faith journeys and different geographical journeys. Our lives have been influenced by the people we have met, often in ways that we are barely aware of. But something somewhere has drawn us into the company of the church, into the company of Jesus and of God.

We may have thought that we knew what we were joining and why. Again it will have been different for different people ranging I suspect from some deeply spiritual experience, to a need for company and a sense of belonging. We come with different expectations of commitment, a quick service on a Sunday morning, or a lifestyle that revolves around church activities. Hopefully we come willing to be surprised by where we later find ourselves. Coming from a family that can barely cook and has always given baking a wide berth I have been amazed to find that when I braved the kitchen and made a Bakewell tart for a ploughman's pudding, I was asked to do it again, and again. (Admittedly some have been more baked badly than baked well.)

I am fascinated by Nathaniel's comment about Nazareth – can anything good come from there? It seems that this may have been motivated by nothing other than the normal rivalry between neighbouring towns, although I am sure we all know of instances where similar comments have a more sinister motivation. But it does highlight that as well as ourselves we bring our prejudices and preconceptions. Not just the obvious ones about gender, race, or the school someone went to but more subtle things, brown sauce or red sauce, coffee from a fancy machine or a nice cup of tea. We can surprise ourselves with our built-in opinions which colour the way we see other people and situations.

All of which would normally bring us, a pick and mix bag of people to the church door, forming our various congregations, engaging in all the activities of church. But the door is currently shut for good reason. Whatever we thought we had joined it isn't this. We are unable to do some of the things we would normally do to encourage people to 'come and see'.

But there is still a lot going on. Encouraged by Paul we have braved the world of technology and are enjoying worship from the security of our own homes. We are talking to each other far more effectively than we often have in the past. As I make regular calls to the people on my contact list I am delighted to hear of all the other contacts taking place between church members. At this time people are feeling called to help with keeping in touch in a variety of ways. Our current calling may be different to what has happened in the past, certainly no one will be having a quiet word over coffee at the end of a service. But being called to serve is no less valid at the moment whether coming from a request from the Vicar or a feeling inside that something needs doing. Rather than wondering how someone is getting on, make contact and find out.

The buildings may be closed but the church is still open for business. Instead of being gloomy about the lack of services in church be positive about the online (including on the telephone line) services that are taking place. Like Nazareth the lockdown may yet produce something that is good, may open us up to different ways of doing things and with the aid of technology encourage others to 'come and see'.