

Homily – God is Calling You

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As I begin today, I want to pause and give you a moment to listen for God's call to you. How is God calling you?

Each and every one of us has been created by God, and we have all been created in the image of God. As the psalmist says, each of us is wonderfully made in our mother's womb, for Christ is in all and around all. This means that you have a bit of Christ inside of your being. Our God of the universe is always calling or singing to that bit of Christ that is part of you. So, how is God calling you? And, how will you respond?

Sometimes it can be difficult to hear God's call. We each have a lot of noise in our lives, or at least I do. The world is a noisy place. The twenty-four hour news cycle, the internet, and the political climate in our world all make it hard to hear God. Wise ones learn, not only to turn off the noise, but to make space in the midst of daily life to pause and listen and wonder. What am I supposed to be doing that is of God?

In our Old Testament reading we have the story of God's call to Samuel, one of the greatest prophets of ancient Israel. In this story, Samuel actually hears God calling him by name, or more specifically he hear an audible call with his ears. Samuel doesn't recognize who is calling him until the wise Eli coaches and mentors him. Eli points Samuel in the right direction towards God. And then when Samuel again hears God's call he responds with something we all should be saying, "Speak, for your servant is listening." In the midst of daily life, and sometimes even in the middle of the night, we need to be listening for God's call to us. The call is there. And in response, we can ask, God, how can I reflect your love back out into the world?

Now, have you ever noticed that sometimes we hear God but we don't like the call. In the Old Testament, Jonah is famous for hearing God's call and going in the opposite direction instead. In that story the whale helped get Jonah back on course again. As you reflect on God's call to you are you answering the call or are you rejecting the call? Here are some reasons we reject a call. Maybe you are not ready to forgive something that happened to you. Maybe you have a distraction that seems more attractive. Or, maybe your need for control, admiration, or safety is getting in the way of God's call. We can spend a lifetime unshackling ourselves from the needs of our ego or false self. But, I can assure you that there is beauty in letting go of these needs that keep you from living into the call that God has set before you. So what is God calling you to release, and what is God call you to pick up?

This week, and next week, our Gospel reading is about Jesus' call to his disciples. Over his lifetime Jesus called many men and women to follow him, and today we hear of the call to Philip and Nathaniel. And, like many of us Nathaniel is a little skeptical and has some questions to be answered before he will answer the call. What questions or pre-requisites do you have before you will answer Jesus' call to follow him?

I think one of the things that I want to know about being a follower of Jesus is whether it is going to hurt. Will there be pain involved, or will it only be the wonder and glory of which Jesus tells Nathaniel? And, I think we all know the answer. Sometimes it will hurt to be a follower of Jesus. We may hope that it is all roses and beautiful sunsets, but sometimes the spiritual life of being a follower of Jesus has some sting to it. I think the hurt happens for three main reasons.

First, every time we open ourselves up to love, we also open ourselves up to pain. Spirituality is all about healthy loving relationships with God, others, self, and the rest of non-human creation. Love is an essential part of who God is and love is necessary for our spiritual journeys. We were created in love, and we were created to mirror God's love, but each of us knows from our own life experience that love can hurt. Whether we love a pet and they only live ten to twenty years before dying. Whether we love a child and have to let go of that child as they grow up and move away. Whether we have a loved one who gets ill and needs some serious care. Whether we open our hearts in love to the people of Gaza and see the horrible pain in their midst. So, when we answer the call of Jesus into a journey of love, then we open our hearts up to be wounded. However, I can assure you that love is worth the cost.

And, I think there is a second reason there are costs associated with being a follower of Jesus. That second reason is that Jesus call us to let go of our egos and false self. The false self or small self is your launching pad, your body image, your job, your education, your clothes, your money, your car, your success, and so on. These are the trappings of ego that we all use to get us through an ordinary day. They are a nice-enough platform upon which to stand, but they are largely a projection of your self-image and your attachment to it. The false self is the psychological self that you have crafted, as opposed to the self that was given by God and is in the image of God. Conversely, the true self is who you objectively are from the beginning, in the mind and heart of God. It is who you were before you did anything right or anything wrong. It is your original innocence and original beauty. Love is the reason you were made, and love is the true self of who you are. Our egos will cause us pain as they cling to a shallow way of being. However the surrendering of your false self is the necessary suffering needed to find the pearl of great price that is always and already hidden inside each and every one of us. So when we answer the call of Jesus to reveal

the beauty that is already hidden within us, we open up ourselves to pain. However, I can assure you that this beauty is worth the price.

And, I think there is a third potential change needed to be an effective follower of Jesus. There are many options for the third change but I'm going to go with the need to adopt non-dualistic thinking. This change is related to letting go of the false self and it is foundational for the spiritual journey. Although we begin life, as very young children, as non-dual thinkers, usually by the age of seven we are all dualistic thinkers and, sadly many of us stay that way for the rest of our lives. Dualistic thinking is the well-practiced pattern of knowing most things by comparison and then, very quickly, by competition. For some reason, once we compare or label things, and thus judge things, we almost always conclude that one is good and the other not so good or even bad. This is very true as we judge other people, some are good, usually those who are like us, and some are bad, usually those other people. And sadly, the mind trapped inside of dualistic thinking is not open to change. How else can we explain the obvious avoidance of so many of Jesus' major teachings? Jesus' direct and clear teachings on issues such as nonviolence, a simple lifestyle, love of the poor and our enemies, forgiveness, inclusivity, mercy, and not seeking status, power, or possessions, have all been overwhelmingly ignored throughout history by the vast majority of Christian churches. This avoidance defies explanation until we understand how dualistic thinking protects and pads the ego and its fear of change.

Instead, Jesus is calling us to a non-dualistic way of consciousness. In this way of thinking and being we bear the ambiguity, the inconsistencies, and the brokenness of all things in a way that can only be called love. We stop dividing things into categories of good and bad, especially not judging some people as good and other people as bad. We see that we are all a mixture of good and bad, and we are all the beloved of God. We all, every single person, have a bit of Christ in and around us. This is the way Jesus sees us, and this is the way he calls us to see and be. Our false self can cause us a lot of angst as we shift to a non-dualistic consciousness, but I assure you it is worth it.

Before I conclude today I want to share a poem by Father Richard Rohr called "The Shining Word And" When we allow and A-N-D to be our way of being that it help us open to love, it helps us move into our true self, and it shifts us to a non-dualistic way of thinking. Here is the poem.

And, teaches us to say yes
 And, allows us to be both/and
 And, teaches us to be patient and long-suffering
 And, is willing to wait for insight and integration
 And, does not divide the field of the moment

And, helps us to live in the always-imperfect now
And, keeps us inclusive and compassionate towards everything.
And, demands that our contemplation become action
And, insists that our action is also contemplative
And, is the mystery of paradox in all things
And, is the way of mercy
And, makes daily, practical love possible.

So, may you practice saying and thinking and. And may you respond to God's particular call to you. How are you being called by God?