

Reflection for 2nd Sunday of Epiphany — When God calls by Megan Cambridge, Lay Reader

There are many stories about people who hear God's call. We hear two such stories in our readings for today. From the Old Testament we read about the little boy Samuel. His mother Hannah had prayed that God would give her a child and promised she would dedicate that child to God. God answered her prayer and gave her a son and when he was still quite young, she took him to the temple to assist Eli, the aging temple priest.

I love the story of Samuel it is such a human story. Samuel is fast asleep one night and he hears a voice calling him. Of course, he thinks it's Eli but it isn't. The call comes 3 times before Eli realises it is God calling and tells Samuel what to say. We don't always realise the voice calling us is that of God. We think it can't be or it's not for us and it can take a while before we realise or accept that, yes, it is God and, yes, it is for me. For this Lay Reader it took much avoidance and telling myself it can't be me before listening to a children's sermon about Jonah and finally realising I had to do something.

In our Old testament reading Samuel is still a little boy but God was about to use him to carry out His work and what a significant role he played in choosing the first two kings for Israel; Saul and David.

Then in the gospel reading Jesus called to Philip, "Come with me". Philip seems to realise a little quicker than Samuel (and me) and rushes off to find his brother Nathanael to share his news. Nathanael is more sceptical that this was the Messiah. The Messiah was not going to be coming from Nazareth. Nazareth was not even mentioned in the Old Testament prophecies. However, in meeting Jesus Nathanael's scepticism is turned to faith. We know that this call from Jesus led to Philip and Nathanael becoming messengers of the gospel.

Throughout time, we find God calling people to carry out specific tasks. Think of wealthy, settled Abraham who was called to leave everything and go to a land that God would show him; the reluctant Moses who was called to lead the people of Israel to freedom; the shepherd boy David was called to be king; Gideon, who wanted proof that it was really God who was speaking to him, who was called to lead an army against Israel's enemies; the tax collector Matthew was called to be a disciple; the Christian persecutor, Saul of Tarsus, who was called to be a missionary to the Gentiles.

Just over 150 years ago William and Catherine Booth lived in London. William kept asking himself, "What is God calling me to do?" Taking a walk late one night through the slums of London's East End the message was clear. Every fifth building was a pub and most had steps at the bar so little children could climb up and order gin. On his return home he told his wife how it seemed that God was calling him to do something for those children and their parents. There was no need to travel to some far-off country to find people who needed help they were right there in front of him. Later that year, in 1865, the couple opened the "Christian Mission" in London's poorer districts. This grew into what we know as the Salvation Army. Not everyone is called to do something as momentous as the Booths.

In some cases it's not obvious why God chooses who he does. When God called Mary to be the mother of our Lord, she was too young, too poor, unmarried, too ordinary, but God called her anyway. When Jesus called Peter and James and John, they were simple fishermen with no special qualifications. At times they were extremely slow to catch on, but He called them anyway. What is evident in all these examples is that the people whom God calls to do His work are ordinary people like you and me.

In every case, God is fully aware of their lack of confidence and skills. No doubt, He knew very well that what He was asking them to do was dangerous and would severely test their courage and commitment. At the burning bush God said to Moses, "I will be with you." To the doubt filled Gideon, God said, "Peace. Don't be afraid. To the young Jeremiah, God said, "Do not be afraid, I will be with you to protect you.... I

am giving you the words you must speak." To the disciples, Jesus final words were, "I will be with you always to the close of the age."

God hasn't changed He is as real today as He was to Moses and the disciples. He still calls ordinary people like you and me. He still challenges us, still confronts us and tests us. He still calls you and me to do His work in this world, even though we can think of a million reasons why He has chosen the wrong person. Most of us here were called by God to be a part of His family at baptism. We read last week about John's baptism of Christ as He started out on His Ministry. As always when God calls, there is His assurance that He will always be there with us to help us throughout our life's journey.

The call God issues to each of us is not just a once only thing that happened a long time ago when we were baptised, but is a daily calling, by name to do His work.

When God calls ordinary people like us to be His disciples, to invite others to come and see Jesus, as Philip did for Nathanael, to do acts of love and kindness, to be active and faithful members of the church, or whatever it might be that God calls us to do, then God grant that our response might be the same as young Samuel; "I'm listening, Lord. What do you want me to do?"