

Now That's Remarkable!
(Text - John 1:43-51)

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When we read about Biblical figures, or hear about contemporary people, who claim to have received a direct call from God, we may find ourselves feeling a bit doubtful or disheartened. Don't get me wrong. I think it's fantastic that Isaiah felt that the Holy One had called him - while still in his mother's womb. I also think it's wonderful that Jesus goes to Galilee, *finds* Philip and says to him, "Follow me!" - and that Philip then sets-up his friend Nathanael with a face-to-face meeting with the Messiah. The problem is, those kind of exceptional encounters just don't seem to happen very often; or at least they don't happen to many people *I* know. Perhaps you yourself have thought, "If God would just give me a sign! Nothing spectacular, just something to let me know that God really is there, and that I'm on the right track."

I think most of us, at one time or another, desire some kind of personal contact with our Holy Source of Life - a vision, a dream, *some* form of communication that lets us know that we are connected to the Holy One. So this morning, I'd like us to think about what that might actually feel like - or be like - if you or I were literally *called* by God. How might we recognize that call? How would we know that it was really *God* speaking to us, and not just our imagination? How could we tell if it was a Divinely inspired dream, or the result of a late-night burrito-binge? One thing we *do* know, is that people like Isaiah and Nathanael initially had doubts of their own, as did *many* of the Biblical figures who experienced a close encounter of the Divine Kind. So perhaps their stories can help us grapple with our own questions concerning this notion of hearing, and responding to the call of God today. Personally, I believe that each of us has received *some* sense of a Divine Calling in our lives - otherwise, we probably wouldn't be in this particular place, at this particular moment. I also believe that, in one way or another, the Holy One extends a call to *every person*; though certainly not everyone hears or responds to that call. In this morning's readings, there are three specific conditions that stand-out, which I think can be helpful in allowing you and me to hear and respond to God's call in our lives. They are: *expectation, preparation, and acceptance.*

I begin with *expectation*, because what we *expect* can definitely effect what you and I will experience. I find it amazing, that when I'm having a particularly bad day, I run into so many other cranky and negative people. And in those times when I'm anticipating problems to arise, lo and behold, they usually do! Yet on my good days, almost everyone I meet seems reasonable and up-beat. And when I begin my day with an optimistic outlook and a positive purpose, that day seems to go quite

smoothly. Who knows, maybe, it has something to do with my own frame of mind, and my own *expectations*.

In that regard, it's not surprising that Isaiah receives a call to proclaim God's message to Israel, and to the ends of the earth. Throughout his life, Isaiah senses that he has been created specifically to serve God. And not only does Isaiah *expect* that to happen, he also spends much of his life preparing for that day to come. Likewise for you and me, *preparation* is an important part in being sensitive to that Divine Calling in our lives. The more we prepare ourselves for Divine Possibilities, the better we will be able to recognize and embrace them when they arise before us.

Martin Luther King Jr. didn't just wake up one morning and say, "I think I'm going to lead a civil rights movement." The truth is, his entire life had been a steady preparation for that pivotal moment. By 1954, at age 25, King had graduated from college and seminary, and was called to be the pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. As the new Pastor in town, he was elected to (or stuck with) the position of President of the newly formed Montgomery Improvement Association. Then, on December 5th, 1955, an event took place in Montgomery, which would launch a dream for Martin Luther King and for millions of others. Rosa Parks, a seamstress returning home from a long day of work, was arrested for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white man. And with her arrest, began a boycott of the Montgomery Bus Company, which would last more than a year.

Martin Luther King, as leader of that civic Improvement Association, became the leader of that boycott; and from that point forward, became a Messenger of the *Dream*: The Dream that freedom, equality, and justice might be realized by *every* person, regardless of race, color, or creed. King was able to envision and articulate that Dream as well as, or better, than anyone else. Much like the prophet Isaiah, King's entire life had helped him prepare for that one day when - through a unique convergence of circumstances - God would call him to step forward and say, "Yes, God, I will follow the path that is opening-up before me!"

Now, all this is not to say that you or I won't be able to hear God calling us if we're not *expecting* it, or *preparing* for it; however, we certainly improve our chances of hearing that call, by regularly practicing our faith and by seeking to increase our awareness of the Holy Presence which surrounds us each day. The critical thing, is that you and I don't miss - or ignore - that call because it comes to us in ways which seem too common or mundane to truly be *Divine*.

Nathanael was anticipating and preparing for an encounter with the Holy. As he sat under that fig tree, he was probably studying the Holy Scriptures; because,

according to Jewish tradition, that was a proper place to sit and contemplate those sacred texts. Beneath that fig tree, Nathanael searched and prepared, with hope and expectation, for a Divine Revelation. However, he almost missed it, because God's message came to him in a very *ordinary* way: not in a booming voice from heaven, or lightening flashing across the sky, but by the personal witness of his friend, Philip.

Philip says to Nathanael, "We have found the One about whom Moses and the prophets wrote. It is Jesus of Nazareth!" But Nathanael has trouble accepting that. How could God's Anointed One come from Nazareth, that little town down the road? ("Can anything good come out of... *Richfield?*") Also, how does Philip *know* that this Jesus truly is God's Messiah? It all seems too casual, too ordinary for Nathanael to accept. Yet Philip doesn't argue with him; he simply invites him to check it out for himself. "Come and See! Come and meet this Jesus, and discover the truth for yourself!" So Nathanael accepts Philip's invitation, and Nathanael encounters the Divine, through a truly natural way - the gracious invitation of a good friend.

Oftentimes, God speaks to you and me through seemingly simple and ordinary ways: the aesthetic beauty of a sunset, or a snowfall; the inspiring message of a story, or a song; the kind words or actions of a friend, or a stranger. Yet perhaps most amazing of all, are those times when God chooses to speak *through* you and me: through *our* reaching out with compassion to those around us; through our prayers and hugs for those who are hurting; through our warm welcome to all those who come among us; and through our simply inviting our friends and neighbors to join us on this remarkable journey of faith.

Just as Philip says to Nathanael, you and I can also say to others, "Come and see! Come and meet this Living, Loving Christ - who continues to live and love in and through this seemingly ordinary, yet extraordinary Family of Faith!" For you see, not only is God still speaking *to* us today, God also continues to speak *through* us! And that, my friends, is a remarkable thing!