

2ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B)

1 Samuel 3:3b-10, 19; John 1:35-42
January 15, 2012

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In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our First Reading is the winsome story of a call that took place some 1,100 years before Christ called his first disciples. Young Samuel was sleeping at a local shrine — long before the Temple in Jerusalem was built — when he heard a voice. He was living at this local place of worship because his mother, Hannah — when she was still childless — had prayed for a son, and had promised that if God gave her one, she would dedicate him to the Lord’s service.

So little Samuel was sleeping in the Holy Place where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, when he heard the voice that called him. Eventually he recognized whose voice it was, and he quickly gave the response old Eli told him to give, “*Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.*” God called, and Samuel listened, and accepted his call. He went on to anoint Israel’s first king, Saul, and its next and greatest king, David, from whose line Jesus would be born.

And when Jesus was born and grew up, he in turn called others, and that is today’s Gospel. Jesus called his first disciples: John and Andrew who were at the time, disciples of John the Baptist. They left John and followed Jesus who at one point turned around and asked them what they were looking for. What did they want — really want? They said they wanted to know where he stayed. This was no passing fad. They wanted to spend time with him. They wanted to learn what he was all about.

One of these early disciples, Andrew, proves to be one of the most attractive characters in the New Testament. For one thing, Andrew was always content to play second fiddle to his brother, Peter. For another, Andrew simply couldn’t keep the good news to himself. He seems always delighted to introduce people to Jesus.

Indeed, the New Testament mentions Andrew three times, and each time that is just what he does. Andrew brings the boy with the five loaves and two fish to Jesus. Andrew brings some inquiring Greeks to see Jesus. And of course, in today’s Gospel, Andrew runs and gets his brother, Simon, to meet Jesus. When Simon arrives, Jesus changes his name to Peter — a sign that when God looks at people, he sees not only what they are, but also what they can become.

It is perhaps significant to note that in today’s Gospel, we find Jesus’ very first words recorded by St. John. After Andrew and John have begun to follow Jesus, the Lord asks them: “*What are you looking for?*” The disciples respond with a question of their own saying, “*Where are you staying?*” And Jesus doesn’t answer their question directly; instead he simply invites them. He says, “*Come and see.*” A bit later, those very same words of invitation will be repeated by Philip as he calls Nathanael to be a disciple of Jesus, He simply says: “*Come and*

see".

One of the interesting things is that in St. John's Gospel, people are invited to follow Jesus *before* they understand him. Their questions are not all answered ahead of time, but only as their life with Jesus unfolds. Jesus doesn't ask people to park their questions at the church door before entering.

I wonder, how do we deal with questions — our own, or those of people we hope will follow Jesus? Some Christians may be afraid to say anything about Christ, lest someone ask a question they cannot answer. Others may be confused about the place of questions in the life of faith. It's not uncommon to think that if you have faith, well then you must have all the answers, but no more questions. Likewise, some may think if you have questions, then you can't really have genuine faith. But again, in John's Gospel, faith and questions often work together. Faith is the basis from which understanding grows, and faith welcomes questions.

I suspect that very few people come to faith in Jesus because of an academic argument. Rather, they are invited or brought into a community of people centered on Christ. In the community which bears Christ's name, they can meet and experience the Lord in the Word, in the Sacraments, and in the community itself. In the community which bears Christ's name, the seeker may question Jesus. And Jesus, may very well question the seeker. The Gospel invites honest questions, and it ultimately points us to the one who is *God's living answer*.

For those who are outside the faith looking in, this is surely an encouraging message. We must invite them. We must encourage questions: "*Come and see!*"

So, how do people get started following Jesus? Well, in the first chapter of John, Philip is the only person whom Jesus himself calls directly. Everyone else — all the others — come through the witness and invitation of someone else — through John the Baptist, or a through a friend or through a family member. And that is probably the simplest and best form of evangelism: a friend or a family member gently witnessing and inviting another person to "*come and see.*" Just a simple, gracious invitation: "*come and see.*"

In an essay on evangelism, Kathleen Norris writes about her own conversion and the gentle evangelism practiced by the congregation she ultimately joined. She writes these words:

*I thanked the congregation for not using...heavy-handed tactics
on me when I first began attending church.*

They...respected the mystery of faith...

I came back to church in fits and starts...

*Maybe some of them wondered what was going on,
while others knew that I was engaged*

in studying with the pastors.

But no one pressured me. And I am most grateful.

*The people in the congregation did evangelize
in another sense, by saying and doing things
they probably don't remember.*

*Most likely they didn't think of it as "evangelizing" —
the name of Jesus, for example, may not have come up —
but little things they said or did revealed their faith
in healthy and appealing ways.*

*Something about the way they lived their faith —
or even failed to live it,
failings I could recognize in myself —
convinced me to throw in my lot with them and join the church...*

*The best evangelism...
presumes an understanding of relationship
that precludes forcing your faith...on another person.*

The spreading of the Gospel of Jesus truly is relational: one by one God invites people into the new covenant. One by one we can let others know they are welcome. One by one we can live the truth that faith is not the absence of difficult questions. One by one we can point others to the truth we know in Jesus. One by one we can invite others to "*come and see.*"

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