Homily – 2nd Sunday in Ord. Time (B)

*1 Sam. 3: 3-10, 19; 1 Cor. 6: 13-15, 17-20 & Jn. 1: 35-42*

This might sound like a rather strange – indeed possibly even shocking – thing for a Vocations Co-ordinator to say, but sometimes I find the great biblical “call narratives” just a little discouraging. Whether it is the great heavenly vision of Isaiah, at the end of which he “volunteers” to be God’s prophet and has his lips purified by the seraph’s burning coal, or the story of the call of the first four Apostles – the story we will hear in next Sunday’s gospel – where the response is so immediate that they “drop everything” and follow Jesus, these stories can seem very far from our own experience, our own lives. And it’s not just me. On quite a number of occasions during my vocations work with young people, I have heard people “beating themselves up” because their response to the Lord’s call has been slower than Peter and Andrew’s, has been more half-hearted than that of Isaiah – and I say that as someone whose own response to the call was much more like that of Jonah than Peter and his brother. We can be left feeling like “second-rate disciples”.

And even when it is not directly a question of a call to a particular ministry, or priesthood or religious life, these stories can again, perhaps, leave us a little discouraged. Our discipleship can feel lukewarm compared to the dramatic events we hear of, our own “following” just rather mundane, rather ordinary compared with what we hear and read. And I suspect that – as each of us continues to grow older – we might wonder what these “call narratives”, these stories of “beginnings”, can say to us as perhaps we feel closer to the ending rather than the beginning of our journey of faith.

In a sense, if that *is* how we are feeling, I think we can take comfort from the readings we have just heard proclaimed. We have indeed just heard two “call narratives” – the call of Samuel, the calling of Andrew and his friend from St John’s gospel – but both those narratives are rather different from the more dramatic accounts in Isaiah and the Synoptic gospels. Indeed, one might almost call them “slow motion callings” – at least when compared to some others of the same genre.

In that well-known passage in our first reading, we hear the “call” of the boy Samuel. But it is a slightly strange kind of call. In the first place, Samuel has been living in the sanctuary at Shiloh for a number of years, ever since he was weaned, ministering to God there under the care of the old priest Eli. Yet still the writer tells us: *He had as yet no knowledge of the Lord and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him*. Then, after all those patient years of service, God breaks his silence and calls him by name – but the boy does not recognise the voice. Only at the third call does the wise old man realise what is happening, and give Samuel the response he is to make: *Speak Lord, your servant is listening*. And even then, when the boy answers the Lord, he does not give him a command or a ministry; rather, in that part of the reading omitted, he gives the boy a prophetic message for the old priest regarding the unworthiness of his wastrel sons. Perhaps there are a number of points we might notice. During his early years of service in the sanctuary, he does not *know* God, and yet he serves him faithfully. God *seems* absent, his silence total, and yet Samuel’s very existence is itself a *sign* of God’s action – he is the wonderful child born of the barren mother after her many prayers and tears. And when finally Samuel *is* called by name, it is not to action but to be *attentive*, to be open to God’s word – *Speak Lord, your servant is listening*. Perhaps there are things we might learn here about our discipleship – a discipleship which serves faithfully even when God seems to be absent and silent, a discipleship which is attentive, ready to hear whenever God should call, a discipleship which – like the boy himself – took time to grow and be formed, a discipleship which needed patience and training, not just to hear but to *recognise* God’s voice.

The gospel passage too gives us a slightly strange “call narrative”. John the Baptist points Jesus out to Andrew and his friend, and at once they *follow* Jesus – and they follow him before he has said even a word to them. And sensing their “following”, Jesus turns and asks that key question: *What do you want?* In the context, that is not a bad translation (at least depending on where you put the emphasis!), but the Greek is more nuanced – *What are you seeking?* Or, as in the Vulgate: *Quid quaeritis?* Probably saying the first thing that came into their heads, Andrew and his friend ask the Lord where he lives, and only then does Jesus offer his invitation: *Come and see*. They see, and they believe, and the “chain reaction” of calling continues the following morning with Andrew bringing his brother to the Lord.

*Quid quaeritis?* What are you seeking? What do you want? It seems such a simple question – but those words are the very first words Jesus speaks in John’s gospel. What are you looking for? It is a question which returns at the end of the gospel, when the mob in Gethsemane approach Jesus, and he asks them twice: *Whom do you seek?* The answer then is very clear, almost ironically so – they want Jesus of Nazareth, the one they have come to arrest, and try and put to death. They have rejected the path of discipleship, but it was not so for Andrew and his friend. Jesus saw in them people who were hungry for something, who were thirsting for something – the promise of God, the forgiveness of sins as John had prophesied, the Messiah – and so he issues his invitation: *Come and see*.

Perhaps again, there is something there too for our discipleship. Our discipleship must always be hungry, always be thirsty; as the psalmist says: *O God, you are my God, for you I long; for you my soul is thirsting* (Ps.62:1). Our discipleship must always be searching, always seeking: *Of you my heart has spoken – seek his face; it is your face, O Lord, that I seek – hide not your face* (cf. Ps.26). Our discipleship is always to try to answer that question: What do you *want*? What are you *seeking*? And if our discipleship is like that, no matter how young or old, no matter how good or bad we are – if our discipleship is still driven by desire for God, then we too will hear Christ’s invitation: *Come and see*.

Each day in the monastery, we begin with the same psalm, Ps.94, which contains the words: *O that today you would listen to his voice, harden not your hearts*. Each day we try to make ourselves like the boy Samuel, open-eared, attentive for whenever God speaks to us. Just so that invitation of Jesus to Andrew – *Come and see* – is not a once-for-all offer, not a single chance – it is the invitation he makes to us each and every day, as long as our “today” lasts. He makes that same invitation here and now as we gather round his altar to receive his Body and Blood – O taste and see how gracious the Lord is: Come and see. Amen.

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