

Many of you may already know that there is something new in my life---retirement! Those of you who know me well, know that I'm pretty much a task-oriented person; which was affirmed by so many people commenting that they couldn't believe that I'd ever *really* stop working. And to be honest, I have quite a bucket list of tasks at hand prepared for retirement ---scanning all my mom's photographs into the computer, cleaning in the corners, joining the gym, volunteering for some committee work, *of course* continuing to supply preach when asked--- --- to keep me busy. Plus I am finding there are many additional distractions---the "we-need-to-get-groceries-so-why-don't-we-go-out-to-lunch" daily detours. If you add up my bucket and the detours, the days seem to fly by.

Yet, there is something very disconcerting about this, and it's not just because I'm a type-A achiever. I get things done---but those things seem to lack the focus, the "importance," that I used to sense. Working at the seminary, my "work" was not as much about pay as it was about ministry. I'm one of those people whose "gift/talent" is to be excited by study and the most exciting thing I've ever found to study is the Word. It seems I've been "built" with this purpose. And it was even better to get to be surrounded by others who were like me and to get to teach it to students! I think that's what is meant by having a "call on your life." The old hymn says "it's a gift to come down where you ought to be..." It's satisfying when that happens and it's disorienting to find that that has come to an end. And it has me thinking about the whole idea of God **calling** us to do a thing, and the when, where, and why that happens and how that changes throughout our life. Low and behold, the lessons today talk about just that!

I started unpacking the lessons by looking up the word "CALL" which turned out to be very interesting. "Call" is a verb, mostly often used in Scripture when naming something; in the creation story, God "calls" or names the day, night, sky, earth, and sea. Then, in imitation of this, the first task given to Adam was to name all the creatures (including woman). With this calling/naming/giving identities we see the order of authority---God over the cosmic things, humankind over the earthly entities. The word אָדָם which means "man" (adamah is ground) is used only descriptively ("the man") until 3:17 when God uses it as a name in rebuke! (You could say the first time Adam is "called" by God is a call to repent!) (BTW, Eve doesn't get her name until 3:20. This was the first time I noticed that!) Part of the surprise is that the tasks of stewardship and fruitfulness are given to Adam and Eve well before their individuality/names. Here in is the basis of God's relationship with humankind --- Creator/owner to created/manager. "Call" also means "get asked to do something." So God owns and humankind/ground people get asked to work for him! And so it follows even after the garden; God calls people to a purpose...

...even the most ordinary people. Think about the ordinariness of some of the characters of the Bible. Abram, a 11th generation descendant of Noah, was comfortably resettled in Haran when God spoke, launching him on a further journey to become a great nation. The prophet Amos was keeping sheep and growing figs before God sent him to prophecy to Israel. It sounds like Philip was just doing whatever he usually did---he didn't even go out of his way to talk to Jesus (as had Andrew in the passage before our text), Jesus came to him. Like the Father seeking Adam and Eve in the cool of the evening in the garden, it is the Divine who approaches the mundane/earthly.

And God's call isn't age-dependent either, apparently. Calls come at any time of life. While Philip and Nathanael were adults (on their own, maybe fishermen?) Abraham was downright old! On the other hand, Samuel was yet

a child---not yet able to be called a young man. And how old was Mary at the annunciation---we guess about 13. Anytime can be God's time to get in touch...

But back to that word "call." Sometimes it's used as a (verbal) noun synonymous with "vocation" or even "destiny." You hear this in Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus where he opens by entreating them to live "lives worthy of the calling you have received" (4:1) or where he writes to Timothy that he has been called "with a holy calling, not according to works but according to God's own purpose and grace" (2 T 1:9). Some branches of the Church have exclusively used "calling" for pastoral ministry. In my Lutheran tradition, we don't hire pastors, we send them a "letter of call." (BTW, I don't think this is a semantics game for such language evokes the nature of the office of pastor as divinely originated.) But in the sense that all believers participate in the "priesthood," this use of the word, to me, indicates that the task God asks of us is a holy task. Something special asked of a creature created to be special. Something that supersedes our earned ordinariness, that invades our everyday lives of fishing or planting or whatever we work at and expects of us that we relate to our Creator in the manner intended---in service, in humility, in righteousness. And, if that's true, we can count that our call, like our very nature, is continual and we will never be done with it!

But the particulars might change. Especially when we---not just me---are always in the midst of change. From our youth, to young adulthood, to marriage and parenthood, to work, to retirement, to our "golden years"----- God continues to call and, yes, I think to specific tasks. Our abilities and contexts change so it only makes sense that the task before us might, too. And, you know, some jobs either get completed or just plain come to an end. Samuel received a message for Eli and his apostate sons which was received and came to fruition. Then, later in his life, Samuel had another job---remember? Anointing the first king of Israel, Saul. So being done with my ministry at the seminary---that's going to be replaced by something else....right?

And this is my sticky spot. For, in the busyness of everyday living, it's harder to hear those "tweaks" than I expected. So the #1 THING I TAKE FROM THESE TEXTS IS THAT WE NEED HELP HEARING GOD'S VOICE. Samuel didn't hear well--- God's voice was clear three times and finally, it was old Eli who tumbled that God was trying to get Samuel's attention. And, without Philip, Nathanael would never have approached Jesus. We need help hearing God's voice so one of my retirement tasks is to be open to those people and things that will do that. Any guess at where I find those people and things? In the congregation, for sure. in the Book, absolutely! (*Listen, listen God is calling*), in prayer, in intention conversations and spiritual direction. The point, I think, is that God intends us to hear, to take up his work, and to find peace in doing so. Lessons like we have today in 1 Sam and John's gospel serve to remind me that our "call" is much bigger than any job or a task that we might do at the church or work. I don't know about you, but I need to be reminded that God calls us to more than just particular tasks but to BE His .

One last thing. Yesterday was the memorial service for Rick's uncle, Bill Grimm. Some of you may have known him. In the prayers I heard these words: Give us your aid, so we may see in death the gate to eternal life, that we may continue our course on earth in confidence until, by your call, we are united with those who have gone before us, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. May it be so! And may your week be blessed by hearing and following God's voice into humble service.

Listen, listen God is calling, through the Word inviting, offering forgiveness, comfort and joy.