

LISTENING AND FOLLOWING THE LORD

Nic Denny-Dimitriou - 15th January 2006

1 Samuel 3.1-20; John 1: 35-42

OT and Gospel readings complement one another today
Hearing and listening for God, hearing the call of God on our lives – and responding
A few thoughts to prompt our own further response to God

Old Testament passage:

Samuel – voice of the Lord

Not sure of it – something new to him, not many prophetic voices at the time

Not sure how to hear and discern

Samuel – a special calling, and offered to God by his mother at birth

Gospel passage:

A lot of firsts

At the start of Jesus' public ministry, calling people to be his followers

General followers (disciples), and also specific team (apostles – “sent ones” – who would be the immediate team of leaders around Jesus and later pass on his teachings, play essential role in the early Christian community)

They hear Jesus speak, make a decision, and follow – intrigued by Jesus
Enthusiasm – they are convinced they have met the Messiah, the promised special Anointed One from God – and that, after just a day of being with him and staying with him... clearly, he made a deep impression on them. Andrew went to call his brother Simon – who Jesus gave a new name to (Cephas in Aramaic, Petros in Greek = Rock).

Some points to consider:

- Samuel – not sure of the voice of the Lord
 - Not certain how to hear or discern
- The idea of hearing the voice of the Lord may makes some of us want to run
 - Turned off by loud and arrogant people who speak for God with inconsistency in word and deed (but don't let that stop us listening for God!)
- We don't all need “personal voices” or revelations
 - We have Scripture
 - Jesus (as recorded in Scripture)
- Scripture full of examples of God speaking to his followers, but only Moses had the “burning bush” experience – and St Paul had a dramatic revelation of Jesus – but that is not how everyone experiences God!
 - Mostly, in the Scriptures (and continuing experience of the Church through the ages)... a quiet still voice, or one discerned in company with

others, and the few to whom God gives special prophetic voices

- The response is critical:
 - “Speak Lord – your servant is listening”
 - Mary to Gabriel – similar response to God
- Hearing the call of God, issued through Jesus – that is what brings us here
- Gospel reading today is about firsts; there had to be firsts... many have since followed, including us
- All of us have to have a beginning – birth / baptism (presentation in faith, inclusion into the body of the church – whether the person is given the means to live up to that later or not etc. etc.)
- Also other “beginning points” – or “continuation points” – where we consciously decide to continue with God / go further or deeper
 - Or make a new beginning (God not restricted to time / new years)
 - Moments of conversion
 - Experiences that encourage us more faithfully to follow God
- Simon – transformation signified by change of name (Cephas – Petros = Rock); not just out of will but internal change and motivation

- For all followers – not just the Simon-Peter’s of this world
 - “Speak Lord, your servant is listening”
 - Seek out God revealed in the Scriptures
 - Seek out the wisdom of another (not even necessarily your priest)

 - Services – the community at worship (Scripture, teaching, preaching and other areas of input, challenge and encouragement)
 - This year, possibly a short diocesan series on building community
 - Some invited speakers and preachers

 - Saturday mornings, beginning in Feb., devoted to spiritual growth (8-10 spread through the year – if you’ve not customarily attended such events, I challenge you to attend even one!)

- We are all followers of the Lord
 - [Pastor, to a very occasional worshipper: “Are you a servant in the army of the Lord, brother?” “Yes”, he replied. The pastor asked, “Then how come we don’t see you very much? He replied, “I’m in the secret service!”]
- We may laugh, but... We are ALL followers of the Lord – how adequately, is not for others to decide, not even the priest. It is up to us to work out with God and in community, but not for others to judge or measure

- Are we able to listen for God’s voice, to discern God’s call on our lives surrounded by all the clattering noises of our civilisation making their own deafening and strident calls?

- Or at least willing to learn / willing to listen more attentively?
- This is not just something for the Simon-Peter's of God's world
 - Most of the apostles – historical obscurity, yet still fulfilled God's purposes as faithful servants of God
 - Most disciples in history – obscurity (it is not about fame)
 - Most of us will also fade into obscurity, however that doesn't render us useless
- What will make our lives spiritually useless is to ignore God's call to hear God's voice, to come and be his follower

A church's defining statement of intent, which I once read and noted:

“Continuing the work of Jesus, peacefully, simply, together”

For now and in the months that follow, may we be a people who listen for the voice of God in our worship and prayers, through the Scriptures and the church gathered together, and who respond to God by saying: “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening”. And may we be a community that, in our individual and our parish life, continues the work of Jesus. Peacefully. Simply. Together.

Speak Lord, your servants are listening!