

The Second Sunday after Epiphany
January 17-18, 2009
John 1:43-51

“Listening to God’s Calling”

Meet Jeremy Duncan, 15-year-old average American high school boy. He is the star of the comic strip, “Zits.” Jeremy and his parents, Walt and Connie Duncan, are trying to co-exist under the same roof, often with humorous results. A recent comic series showed how Jeremy forgot his mother’s birthday, and how this upset his mom. In the aftermath of the “I’m sorry’s” and “I forgive you’s,” Walt and Connie are having a conversation – well, sort of. Connie says, “I was pretty annoyed when Jeremy forgot my birthday,” to which her husband responds, “Mmm” (he’s busy licking the icing off the candles of her birthday cake). She continues, “But I expressed my anger and then let it go.” “Good,” Walt says. Connie goes on: “Just being heard makes all the difference.” “Yup,” her husband agrees. “I feel so much better,” Connie confides to her husband, and as Walt continues to lick the icing off his wife’s birthday candles, says, “Better about what?” Sound familiar? This may be getting into the whole “men are from Mars and women are from Venus” thing, but hearing and listening are two entirely different things. The Scripture lessons for today speak of listening and responding to God. God’s call comes to several different people in today’s lessons – Samuel and Nathanael. But the truth is that God’s call comes to each one of us. All the baptized people of God have a calling to serve and follow where the Savior leads. The message for this day is entitled “Listening to God’s Calling.” May the Lord’s rich blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus’ sake.

The truth is that God, the Maker and Owner of heaven and earth, wants to have a living and vital relationship with each one of us. This is what’s behind the whole Christmas story of why God would send his Son into our broken and troubled world. God’s desire was – and is – to re-establish that living and vital relationship with his people of every generation. We have a seeking and searching God who goes to great lengths to communicate with his people. The question is, are we listening? The boy, Samuel, was listening. God’s call to him shows that the Lord God is no respecter of gender, age, or station in life. God chooses a young boy who is ready and willing to listen. Instructed by the aging priest, Eli, about how to respond, Samuel replies to God’s call with words that we would do well to use today: **“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening”** (1 Samuel 3:9-10). And as Samuel’s call from the Lord points out, when we listen to what the Lord is saying that message from the Lord may at times be pretty convicting. God makes known to Samuel that Eli’s house and his sons are corrupt and because of their stubborn refusal to repent, God will punish them. In contrast with Eli and his sons, we are told about Samuel that **“... the Lord was with him and let none of his word fall to the ground... and all Israel... knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord”** (1 Samuel 3:19-20). In listening to what the Lord God was saying, Samuel sought with all his heart and mind and strength to follow and do what God said. The result was that the Lord God was honored and glorified through Samuel. May it be so with us! Listening must lead to responding on our part. If we only listen and do not respond, then in contrast with Samuel, God’s words slip through our fingers, fall to the ground, are trampled underfoot and forgotten. May it not be so with us!

God’s call also came to Philip and Nathanael in today’s Gospel lesson. Following his baptism by John in the Jordan River, Jesus embodies that seeking and searching love of the Father to call people into a living and vital relationship with him, starting with those people we know as his disciples. Philip gets it; he understands who Jesus is and what he’s doing. Nathanael – not so much. His cynical response to Jesus may sum up the response of many in our cynical and self-centered culture today: **“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”** and **“Where did you**

get to know me?" (John 1:46, 48). But in the light of Jesus' presence and his all-seeing eyes that knew Nathanael before he ever met him, Nathanael's cynicism and doubt give way to faith and trust: **"Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the king of Israel!"** (John 1:49). The ladder from heaven to earth that Jacob had seen in a dream long ago gives way to Jesus himself being the ladder, the connection, the way from earth to heaven. Like Samuel, Philip and Nathanael listen and respond to God's call that comes to them. Their lives would never be the same.

Our nation is poised for a very historic event with Tuesday's Presidential Inauguration as the first African-American assumes the presidency. For us who live in the metro Washington, D.C., area we see this event not only because of its historic significance, but also because of the impact it will have on traffic, road and bridge closures, and just getting around. As one traffic expert reported, "Don't plan to go anywhere by car on Tuesday." With all of this hoopla, my prayer is that the President-elect will be listening not only to the American people who have elected him, but listening intently and continually to what the Lord God is saying to him as he takes the oath of office. Our nation, and indeed our world, is at a critical crossroads in history. Whether we are Democrats, Republicans, Independents, or brand X, whether Tuesday's Inauguration causes us to rejoice or lament, our calling as Christian citizens of this nation is to pray for the President-elect as he assumes office as Paul the apostle tells us: **"I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness"** (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

Flowing out of our Baptism into Jesus' death and resurrection, God's calling comes to each one of us. At times that calling may come when we least expect it as it did with Samuel and Nathanael. That calling may take us to places we never would have imagined. That calling may stretch us beyond anything we ever thought ourselves capable of. But God is **"able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us"** (Ephesians 3:20). And that power of God is seen nowhere more clearly than at the cross of Christ, for it is here that God demonstrates his saving love for us in such a powerful and amazing way by giving the life of his only Son for us. Listen! God is calling! With Samuel, we respond to that call by saying: **"Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening"** (1 Samuel 3:9-10). May God help us to do this, for Jesus' sake. Amen.