

Epiphany 2 Year B 2016

How urgently do you feel the call of God within your life? I hasten to add that this is not a trick question – a question on how kosher you are as a member of the Church, as part of the Body of Christ. I don't believe that one has necessarily to be levitating or bearing the marks of the Stigmata which some seem to bear – St Francis and Padre Pio come to mind. Neither do I expect people to feel that they are a bit like the advertisement for the National Lottery, with a giant hand appearing, and pointing at a person, with a disembodied voice uttering, 'It's you!'

We have heard the call of the boy, Samuel – a story which captures our imagination with its picturesque telling. One remembers those books like the Ladybird version with pictures of a young child gazing up bathed in a heavenly glow. Perhaps this is where the National Lottery got the idea from. Yet the call of this boy involves a message which God entrusts him to give to Eli – none other than the doom of his house - his family - because he has failed to restrain his two blaspheming sons. A child becomes the mouthpiece of God, supplanting the priest Eli, who has been in charge of the Holy Place, and ultimately becomes one of the greatest prophets of Israel.

We are in a different mind-set when we look at the Reading from Revelation. We move from picture book to the world of metaphor. I think the important element to take from this passage is that John tells us of a visionary world he has entered, filled with imagery of the most vivid kind. He certainly captures our imagination in a completely different way from the account of Samuel. And yet there is also a sense of the *fulfilment* of call within this reading. John weeps because he cannot read the scroll sealed with seven seals. He is told that the Lion of Judah will open the scroll. The lion turns out to be the Lamb who has been slain, and yet is the one who is worthy to open this scroll as the elders surrounding the throne singing:

*'you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God
saints from every tribe and language and people and nation;
10 you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God,
and they will reign on earth.'*

This vivid language might make us feel uncomfortable, and yet this self-offering love of the Lamb – Jesus Christ – draws each one of us to know the love of God in an intimate way. Yes, it is an uncompromising vision, and if it shocks us that is all well and good, because in its extraordinary imagery, it should also lead us to understand the nature of this self-giving love. Jesus is the victor over evil, and conquers through sacrificial love. St John the Divine writes about experiencing despair to his life until he finds the hope above all else, in the face of Jesus Christ.

This leads us to John the Gospel writer. The Season of Epiphany is one which each year we are called to consider who Jesus is – not just for the church, but for the world and each one of us personally. It is a yearly opportunity to think about the manifestation of Jesus Christ within those three areas, but, *most particularly*, within our own lives.

We are still in the first chapter of John's Gospel, so we remember that the Great Prologue talks of 'the Word made Flesh' – that in the face of Jesus Christ we know all that is humanly

possible to know of the mystery of God. John follows this Prologue with the example of John the Baptist, the greatest of all prophets who always points away from himself towards the one he calls *'The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World'* (John 1: 29). The Gospel writer uses a series of days within this first chapter to lead us on a sense of journeying for those meeting and knowing Jesus. Our passage today is the fourth day, and in it Philip calls Nathaniel to meet Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth – tells him that he is the one who fulfils the Law and the Prophets. In the face of Nathaniel's scornful reply – 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' – Philip uses the same words Jesus has used the day before when talking to John the Baptist's followers: 'Come and see.' This is very different to the 'Follow me' phrase which Jesus has used with Philip himself. John is presenting different ways in which the call of Jesus can be heard within a person's life.

As far as Nathaniel is concerned, Jesus uses what seems like a bit of flattery, which calls him to question just how Jesus came to know him. His astonishment and then acceptance of Jesus act on the call he has felt to follow him, but Jesus goes further with a visionary statement – a solemn pronouncement: *'Amen, Amen, I tell you that you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.'*

John the Gospel writer wants us to hark back to the account of Jacob's ladder, but where the divine connection is transformed from a place – what Jacob calls Beth-el – the house of God to the person of Christ. Jesus is made known as the visible house of God, the very gate of heaven made known within our humanity.

The different senses of call that we have heard of within our readings should cause us to consider this: Recognising that God calls us each in different ways. It may sometimes be an urgent calling or just a quiet knowing – sometimes even something like a question mark about the way we live our lives or respond to situations. In these and other situations it is allowing God to work through us, allowing the Divine Presence to take control. And this is about an inward working of God within our lives, because it is as much about interiority as the external sense of God surrounding us.

Above all, it is seeking to live our lives in imitation of Jesus Christ; constantly seeking the Lord as he says to each of us - *'Follow me,'*- knowing that through loving and serving others we find our true selves as we too become signs of self-giving love. What a privilege! In doing so, we quietly proclaim through action and example, *'Come and See!'*

The Post Communion Prayer today is one which encapsulates this call within our lives particularly well – I hope that you won't mind hearing and praying it twice!

*God of glory, you nourish us with your Word who is the bread of life:
fill us with your Holy Spirit that through us the light of your glory
may shine in all the world. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

Almighty God,
in Christ you make all things new:
transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace,
and in the renewal of our lives
make known your heavenly glory;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Post Communion

God of glory,
you nourish us with your Word
who is the bread of life:
fill us with your Holy Spirit
that through us the light of your glory
may shine in all the world.
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Samuel 3:1-10

3 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³ the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the Lord called, 'Samuel! Samuel!' ⁵ and he said, 'Here I am!' ⁶ and ran to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call; lie down again.' So he went and lay down. ⁷ The Lord called again, 'Samuel!' Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call, my son; lie down again.' ⁸ Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. ⁹ The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. ¹⁰ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, 'Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."' So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.'

Revelation 5:1-10

5 Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed ¹ with seven seals; ² and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?' ³ And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it. ⁴ And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. ⁵ Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.'

⁶ Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne.

⁸ When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ They sing a new song:

'You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,

for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God
saints from every tribe and language and people and nation;

¹⁰ you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God,
and they will reign on earth.'

John 1: 43-end

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.' ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.' ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.' ⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!' ⁴⁸ Nathanael asked him, 'Where did you come to know me?' Jesus answered, 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.' ⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' ⁵⁰ Jesus answered, 'Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.' ⁵¹ And he said to him, 'Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.'