

Epiphany 2—January 17, 2021
Text: John 1:43-51
Theme: A Fearsome Thing

When a student goes to the seminary, one of the questions he hears frequently is, “When were you called into the ministry?” Professors are quick to remind the student that he is not called into the ministry until he has a call document from a congregation with his name on it in his hand. That is the external call. It is the call into the office of the Holy Ministry from a congregation of God’s people calling him to be their pastor. The external call is what makes a pastor a pastor. Without the external call, often called the Divine Call, he is a man with a Master’s Degree in Divinity. That is sometimes the difference between the titles Reverend and Pastor. Reverend is often used as an academic title that recognizes a person who has successfully completed the coursework and been granted a Master’s degree in Divinity and may be recognized by their denomination as one eligible to be called into the office of the Holy Ministry. Pastor is a familial title that recognizes a relationship between a man and a group of Christians to are asking him to be their spiritual leader.

Our texts from the Bible today speak of two kinds of calls. One is the internal call which all Christians receive when Jesus calls them to follow him. For most of us, that happened at Holy Baptism when

the Holy Spirit created faith in us. For Nathaniel, who is later on called Bartholomew, the call was immediate, that is directly from Jesus himself. There was no middle man such as a congregation or a pastor. For us the call came through the Means of Grace, either the Word or Holy Baptism, administered by a pastor on behalf of a congregation, through which the Holy Spirit worked faith in us. Nathaniel's Divine call into the Office of the Holy Ministry also came immediately from Jesus himself. Since the original 12 Apostles, all other Divine Calls are mediated. That is, they have come through means, most commonly a congregation.

In the Old Testament we hear of Samuel's call into the priesthood. The call came to him immediately from God himself. This is the Divine Call because Samuel was already a believer. God called him to service in a dream and it was confirmed by Eli. The Epistle to the Corinthians talks of the call to all believers. Paul speaks of the call to faith in almost physical terms. When Christ calls us to faith, it is not just a verbal agreement, it is a possession. Christ literally moves into us where he lives within us as his temple. That means that everything we do, everything we see, everything we experience, Christ is in us. If that makes you uncomfortable, good. It should. It is a fearsome thing to be possessed by the living God.

Epiphany is the season of Christ appearing to us and to the world through us. Just like Samuel, St. Paul and Nathaniel, you and I carry Christ throughout our world. We support Missionaries in foreign lands and that is important but what you do in school, on zoom meetings, at the grocery store, at work and in your neighborhood is every bit as important and maybe more important. As St. Paul carried Christ to the Corinthians, so you, in your own bodies, carry Christ to those around you. That is why feeding your faith in this place is so important. You cannot do the job you have to do unless you stay nourished with the Word of God and his Holy Sacraments. We saw Nathaniel called but that was not then end of the story. It was just the beginning of a lifetime of following Christ and proclaiming him to the world. He began by being the first person in the Bible to confess Christ as King. According to Eusebius, the ancient historian, he went on to preach in India and later Armenia which became the first country to declare Christianity as its official religion. Tradition tells us that Nathaniel or Bartholomew was not favored for preaching the Word to the King which converted him to Christianity. The brother of the king supposedly had Nathaniel flayed alive and beheaded for his work. It is a fearsome thing to be possessed by the living God.

You and I were called on the same path as Samuel, St. Paul, the Corinthians and Nathaniel. We are fed and empowered the same way they were, and by God's grace, you and I will complete whatever work he has given us, no matter how difficult or dangerous. While it is fearsome, it is also glorious to be possessed by the living God.

Being called into God's service means that whatever you do in this life, you know why you are doing it. There is no real mystery here. You are called to serve the living God who dwells within you and he will lead you into whatever paths will allow you to accomplish the work with which he has tasked you. Recently Noah pointed out to me that I have never had to look for a job and he was right. From the moment I began to pursue the path which would end in a divine call into the Holy Ministry, God laid in my path whatever I needed to accomplish the next step. That is not to say that there have not been some frightening moments when I was on a hairpin curve in life and could not see the resolution. It is to say that God had me firmly in his grasp each time and I continued on serving him. It is not to say that every moment has been easy or fun. It is to say that looking back, I can see how each step built on the last to get me to where God wanted me for whatever I was to accomplish.

Just as Samuel, Nathaniel and Paul were called to serve God, so too have you been called through the baptismal waters. None of you have been called into the office of the holy ministry, the external call. But you have the same internal call as I do. The only question is, "Are you following God's call or are you resisting it?" If you are resisting it, see the book of Jonah for further admonition. Resisting God always ends in fish guts. He will not be dissuaded. He dwells within you. You are possessed by the living God and it is a fearsome thing, particularly when you insist on doing things your way instead of his way. He is not a particularly pleasant tenant when we are dragging him into sin. But if you seek to know his way and follow it, there is no joy on this earth that can surpass serving him. Hear the words of the psalmist from Psalm 40.

"I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart; I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry."

"He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God."

**“Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD.
Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not turn
to the proud, to those who go astray after a lie!”**

**“You have multiplied, O LORD my God, your wondrous deeds
and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you! I will
proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told.”**