

Saint Paul's by the Sea
18th January 2015 – 2nd Sunday in Epiphany

1 Sam 3: 1-10, (11-20); 1 Cor 6: 12-20; John 1: 43-51

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be always acceptable in your sight. O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer. Amen.

One holiday as we walked along the beach Murray played a game with our grandchildren; I am sure you have all played it at some time or another, follow the leader.' Of course, Murray was the leader and as he walked in the wet sand, at the water's edge, the children tried to walk in his footprints that he left behind. Some steps were close together and easy for them, others were further apart, and they had great trouble reaching and stepping into his footprints and some were washed away by the incoming tide. How the children laughed with glee as they walked where granddad had walked.

This is what Jesus was calling his disciples to do in today's Gospel reading. To follow him and walk in his footsteps. And he is calling you and me, and just like the children walking in granddad's footprints, sometimes it is easy, sometimes difficult and sometimes we feel Jesus just isn't there, His footprints have been washed away.

Following Jesus has its fun times, filled with laughter and glee, its difficult times, filled with challenges and its down right hard times when we feel everything has been washed away and we can't see where to take the next step. But if we look hard and further ahead the next footprint to walk into can be quite plainly seen.

In the Old Testament reading God was calling Samuel, but Samuel didn't recognise God's voice. He ran to Eli confused and thinking that Eli was calling him. Despite Eli's insistence that it was not him who called, Samuel kept returning to him. Finally, when on the third time Samuel ran to Eli, Eli realised that it was God who was calling out and told Samuel. Once Samuel realised that it was **GOD SPEAKING TO HIM!** He was able to receive God's message, and for a first message from God it must have been a terrifying experience and so difficult to hear.

If we only read first 10 vv it is an idyllic narrative about an innocent young boy, with vv 11-20 the story lines changes and tells of God's overthrow of Eli's family because of the behaviour of Eli's sons who were greedy and disobedient,

However, Samuel didn't flinch and at Eli's insistence he repeated the message of judgement on him and his sons. Samuel grew into one of Israel's most grounded spiritual leaders, overseeing the work of Saul and David.

The truth is God is calling you and me. In Isaiah 43, God tells us, 'I have called you by name, you are mine.' Just as God called Samuel by name, every one of us is called by name, called by God, for a precious special purpose.

Sometimes, like Samuel, we don't recognise God's voice, sometimes, in this crazy world we forget to expect God's voice at all. As the passage from Samuel begins, 'The word of the Lord was rare in those days, visions were not wide spread.'

Perhaps we feel that the voice of God is rare today. Yet, God is always speaking to us, always calling us, even when the pace of the world rarely slows down enough to listen.

There are so many voices calling us today, so many temptations. How do we discern the voice of God? How can we be like Philip in the Gospel story and hear Jesus' call to 'follow him? When, wherever we go the 'noise' of the world is calling us to listen elsewhere. We are daily bombarded with adverts, on billboards, on TV, on the radio, in newspapers, magazines at sports grounds, even in the supermarkets the daily specials are broadcast as we do our shopping. We are called to buy this or that and it will make life better, easier, or more enjoyable. People walk around with mobile phones continuously at their ears. The young people and children are called to follow their peers, fashion and food fads. Sports, astrology, and new age spirituality have become the new religions that they are called to, and follow. How can they hear God calling them, to stop and listen to His voice as Samuel did and Philip, in the Gospel story, as he heeded Jesus' call to 'follow me?' How do they and we in this fast paced world hear and discern the voice of God calling us by name to 'follow him.'

Maybe we need to be like Nathanael and in the rhythm and routine of our daily life learn to sit under our own fig tree. A fig tree in Jesus' time was a place for a bible student to sit and read scripture. It was an appropriate place for meditation, a place of contentment. A place away from all the huzzle and buzzle of the world.

For you and for me we can hear the call of God from the lectern, with the

word of God. We hear God's call in our music and hymns and prayers, We hear God's call from within the congregation, through family and friends, comforting us, guiding us and nurturing us. We can hear God's call in the most unexpected places, from people we have just met. God comes to us in the everyday and insignificant people whom the Church and Society are perhaps not always ready to accept as the voice of God. God can speak to us from movies we watch, books and newspapers we read - And from our heart - we hear God call from within - All we have to do is be like Samuel stop and be still enough to listen and then respond, ' Speak Lord for your servant is listening.'

With regard to young people and children we need to be like Philip and say to them. 'Come and see,' and bring them to Jesus. Show them how Jesus loves them, show them the fun and laughter that can be had when we walk in Jesus' footsteps. Show them that God knows them by name and loves them for who they are and that God has a plan for their lives.

This is not an easy task in today's world, but nearly all of us will in some way or another have contact with young people and children, be it neighbours, nieces or nephews, grandchildren, our own children or friend's children.

This is one of the challenges we face as we follow Jesus and walk in his footsteps. Jesus' summons to Philip, 'follow me,' was not a static, sedentary life, but to a journey. A journey of risk and discovery, sometimes a journey of sacrifice, but always a journey into God's future which involved going out to all the world making 'disciples of all the nations'. We may not be called to go out to the whole world making disciples of all the nations. However, we are called to journey in our own particular part of the world we inhabit and invite people, especially the young and the children to 'come and see' Jesus.

Some might, like Nathanael, be sceptical and say, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth, i.e. the church - what has Jesus to offer me. All we are called to do is say to them 'come and see' and let Jesus call them by name as he did Philip and Nathanael and ask God to bless them as they seek a new path under Jesus' care and let us be friends and helpers who share with them the path that leads to their future.

The Old Testament and Gospel readings today are about listening to God and following Jesus.

Samuel was called in the night from the midst of his sleep to hear a

message.

Philip and Nathanael were called in the day from the midst of their busy lives to follow Jesus.

God is calling all of us. God is calling us not just to follow him. God is also calling us to do and say particular things at particular times. God is calling us to walk a particular path with him, a path that is similar to, but not identical, to the path of all the disciples, apostles and saints before us.

God has a plan for us. God seeks to guide us. And that call is personal to each and everyone of us. God is calling us by name - just as he called Samuel by name. God seeks us out just as Jesus sought Philip.

We need to learn is to follow in Jesus' footsteps and listen for God's call wherever we are, in whatever we see and hear. We need to discern God's voice in the noise of our everyday lives. Amen.