

Sermon Ordinary Sunday 2 Year B 2018

To speak a name reveals a level of knowledge and intimacy. To have our name spoken with love, attention, care is a precious thing. Our society would have us reduced to utilitarian productivity, or a number. Our names, however, are personal and precious. They are symbols of who we are. And it is by our names that God calls us. The idea that God knows us and calls us *by name* is one of the most attractive features of the Old Testament. The wonderful portion we hear today from the First Book of Samuel recounts how the boy Samuel comes to hear the voice of God - and his mission - in hearing his name called. There is a sense in the story that to hear God calling is both disturbing and confusing. It comes in the middle of the night, when Samuel is hoping to sleep. To hear God upsets us, disrupts us, wakes us from our slumber.

So often we imagine the life of faith to be akin to something safe, cosy, respectable. But not as we see it here. The mysterious voice shakes the young Samuel out of his comfort, out of his dreams. The trouble with so many Anglican forms of belonging and believing is that they are so terribly genteel, so terribly respectable, so terribly cosy. One of the historic inner-city Melbourne churches has in its narthex a chaise lounge! Perhaps it suggests that if it all gets too much during the Sunday service you could quietly retire to the chaise, have a lay down and a bit of a nap, in time to be awoken for morning tea... How on earth is a *chaise lounge* an appropriate piece of furniture for a church?! It says all the wrong things about the bold, alert, attentive and total commitment we might hope faith to be. Listening to God and committing to the life of faith ought to rattle us, shake us out of our sleep! Christianity is not about having quiet lay down. We must let go of those dreams which keeps God away and keeps us in bed.

And we see in the story that there is an *insistence* in God's calling. Samuel keeps getting it wrong, misunderstanding the voice, going in the wrong direction. In life there is much noise and clutter and busyness that distracts us. People of faith must learn to put these aside. To hear God, we must cut through so much which seeks to crowd into our lives.

But God *keeps* calling Samuel until he is guided to the right direction. We would know for ourselves: it can sometimes be hard to discern the voice of God, to know what is of God and what instead comes from our fantasies and delusions. Sometimes we need help cutting through it all. To come to know what God is calling us to and calling us to become we need a bit of humility and we need help. In the life of faith we shouldn't be afraid to ask for help, to seek it out. We are not designed to struggle on our own. Eli, for Samuel, realises something more going on in the boys' night time questioning, and so points him in the right direction. He gives him the right advice. Samuel is to say, *speak Lord your servant is listening*. The old man Eli perhaps realises that there will be no rest for him - and no rest for Samuel - until the boy responds adequately, appropriately, properly.

God calls us. He speaks our name. And while it may be disturbing and disrupting, God does not impose or force Godself on us. God's call is an *invitation*, an invitation which we are free to accept or reject. And so today, as we hear it in the gospel, two disciples have Jesus pointed out to them by John the Baptist. John performs the same ministry as Eli, pointing these seekers in the right direction. And in response to their questioning and curiosity Jesus says so simply and beautifully, '*come and see.*' Now, if you are unsure about faith, God, religion, don't just dismiss it based on misinformed biases or unformed prejudices. *Come and see.* If we intend to reject faith and life with God, be sure it is an *informed* rejection. Informed and not based on *intellectual laziness*, which it must be said, lay at the heart of most criticisms directed against Christianity. *Come and see.* And you might be surprised at what you find!

As surely Peter was. We hear also today the important exchange in which Simon, son of John has his name *changed* to '*Cephas*, or (*Petrus/Peter* - meaning 'rock'). There is something in our encounter with Jesus that changes us. Our old names - our old identities - must change. The encounter with Jesus not only changes how we see ourselves, but how others will see us as well. We are changed at our most basic, deepest level. We have heard the call of God on their lives and have chosen - like Samuel and Peter - to respond. But this not a once only moment. God keeps calling us, calling us and leading us to our deepest and truest identity. Hearing God's call to us becomes clearer for us the closer we come to God, the more intently and intentionally we listen to God. It is the task of every Christian to learn to hear that call, so that we can become the people God made us to be. God calls us. May we be ready to listen. Amen.