

Rev. Rob Leacock
January 15, 2012
*there is not a word on my lips,
but you, O LORD, know it altogether.*

Good morning. My name is Rob Leacock. Some of you might know me; you might have seen my family and I sitting in the pew or at a table at breakfast on a Sunday. I am the Upper School Chaplain at the St. Andrew's Episcopal School here in Austin. And I am pleased and humbled to be here this morning.

You don't have to spend too much time hanging around a church before you have some conversation about "calling." As a priest, it's a question that I get asked often: When were you "called" to the ministry? When did you "get the call"?

Very recently I did receive a sort of calling. It actually happened a week ago. In fact it happened in this very church. I received a divine calling of sorts while I was kneeling up here at the communion rail. And right at the moment I received the bread in my outstretched hands and was caught up in a brief moment of silent prayer, I heard it. I heard my name. Someone was calling my name! "Rob! Rob!" It was soft but clear.

So I looked heaven-ward to see Morgan Allen standing over me, “Rob,” he said again, “Can you preach next Sunday?”

So here I am. I can share this story because, Morgan isn’t here—and also it’s true. But I’m glad to be here, I’m glad that I was called.

We arrived this morning confronted with some of scripture’s more famous and powerful “call narratives.” Both Old and New Testament are full of such stories, all of them different and challenging and instructive in their own way. The story of Samuel’s calling is one that may be familiar if not fond to us. It’s the kind of story I seem to come across in every children’s Bible storybook on my three-year-old’s shelf. Samuel, so young and dutiful, eager to please, ready to serve. And Philip in our gospel lesson—himself not unlike Samuel—full of hope, eagerly awaiting God’s anointed, ready to follow, ready to share the good news of the Word made flesh, even with the likes of Nathaniel.

When I consider my own calling I sometimes think of Martin Luther King, Jr. Surely such a man received a grand calling. Surely such a prophetic figure had a direct and beatific dialogue with the Divine! But no. Dr. King in his younger years had lamented that his sense of calling was

not more profound than it was. He had never had any grand vision. God had never spoken to him as he did with so many in scripture. No Isaiah-like vision; no Jeremiah-esque dialogue; no Damascus Road experience. Dr. King wondered if this lack of any supernatural call put into question his ministry. Dr. King ultimately concluded that if God had not tried to dissuade him, if God had not told him to stop, if God had not struck him down, then Dr. King could only conclude, he must be following God's call. I don't know about you, but this admission doesn't make me think any less of Dr. King. On the contrary, the story of his call sounds all too familiar to me.

I think a lot about calling, and ever since I started working at a high school, I think about it even more. I marvel at it, really. I see teachers who give so generously, who pour themselves out like a libation, like a holy offering for the sake of others. I see students—like so many Samuels and Nathaniels, ready, eager, uncertain, skeptical. A mix of so many different things, and yet desiring something like a calling so deeply. As with many things, a calling is rarely what it appears to be; it's rarely what we think it is; and it is never what we wanted or expected. Like with Samuel, we may be

faced with some uncertainty—we may need to hear it a few times, we may need someone to help us discern such a call. Someone like Eli, someone wiser and with more experience. Or Nathaniel, whose calling was full of humbling surprises.

For many years I read the calling of Samuel paying close attention to Samuel, to his journey and experience. I've identified sometimes strongly with this passage, searching for myself within its verses. I'm not sure that I've gained much insight into my own calling in Samuel's. But I wonder if I've been looking at it all wrong.

A calling is not meant to be some convenience or some out. It's not akin to “finding yourself.” It isn't about success, succeeding in all your wildest dreams. It isn't about finding your passion or chasing after ambition. It's not about the future at all. Rather, as it is with Samuel, Philip, Nathaniel, Eli...it's about who you are right now.

A call is never something we should confuse with advice. If I had taken some of the sage advice that came my way, I would either be the world's unhappiest lawyer or the world's most mediocre 11th year PhD student. A call is never something like Murray Hamilton's character of Mr.

Robinson officiously uttering the word “plastics” to Dustin Hoffman’s aimless Benjamin Braddock as though it should be some life-changing revelation. Such meting out of advice falls short of what a calling is.

A calling should never be about making it “all about me,” or suiting God to our own ambitions—God help us. When God calls us, it’s not for us to be the center of attention. You see, I spent so many years trying to see myself in Samuel that I hardly paid any attention to Eli. Eli doesn’t interject himself. He doesn’t encroach upon Samuel’s own journey, or steal Samuel’s thunder. He doesn’t get in the way or make it about him. Eli tells Samuel just enough to allow Samuel to figure it out for himself. He tells Samuel—well, he tells Samuel to quit being so... Samuel. You’re a little too enthusiastic, we might hear Eli say to Samuel. Be still. Listen. Open the ears of your heart. God will tell you everything.

In our gospel lesson we may point to Nathaniel as the figure of calling. The sarcastic response to Philip, followed by Jesus own biting zinger. Oh yeah, smart guy, Jesus’ might’ve said, I may be from some two-donkey, backwater village in Galilee, but I’m still the Son of Man. Nathaniel brings such drama to the story, he plays his part so well.

But...it's Philip, isn't it? It is Philip who hears and responds by faith, Nathaniel, we have found what we've been looking for! It's Philip who's first act as a disciple, as a follower of Christ isn't to chase after Jesus nipping at his heels. But he goes and finds a friend. Philip does not draw focus on himself but on Jesus and on Nathaniel. In the face of Nathaniel's cynicism, what Christ himself calls guilelessness, Philip's response is "Come and see."

What is our calling? Who is God calling you to be? We may wonder when it might happen or what it might be like. There may be times when we are Samuel, striving to do what is right but uncertain perhaps about who we're meant to be. There will be times when we are Nathaniel, without deceit, not easily fooled, too skeptical to be taken in by what might be some chasing after things too-good-to-be-true. Or other times when it might be like Isaiah or Jeremiah. Or Peter or Paul. I wonder if you have ever had a moment like these.

A moment like Philip's. A moment like Eli's.

How often, how well do we look to another and help them hear what God is saying. How often when someone traveling the way with us asks, can I *really* find what I'm looking for? are we there to respond, "Come and see?"