

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time 6556SMF Ps 40:2+4, 7-8a, 8b-9, 10 1 Sam 3:3-10, 19 1
Corinthians 6:13-15,17-20 John 1:35-42

Response: Here I am Lord I come to do your will.

"Look before you leap"

Maybe the best way to launch into this Lectionary ordo is to re-read the closing line of the Book of Judges and the opening line of today's reading. "In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes." (Judges 21:25) "The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread." (1 Sam 3:1b) These two sentences tell an awful lot. The story of Samson at the end of the narrative in Judges represents a total collapse of the society as it transitioned from the tribal organization to kingship. They just could not keep it together! If, in later centuries, coming home from the Exile would be a mess, so was the situation after the so-called conquest, successful according to Joshua, problematic according to Judges. The Book of Judges has less to do with judges—even as they function back then—than with charismatic leaders whom God raised up in a particular situation. However, from Deborah to Samson, no one such leader could get a handle on the situation. The Bible tells it like it is.

The sentence from 1 Samuel begs for what Samuel will have to offer: brokering a king. The sentence from 1 Samuel speak for itself. To borrow a phrase from Amos there was a famine of the word (Amos 8:11) and there was no vision. Eli sits asleep astride this lamentable situation. He is tired, worn out and close to disbelieving that God is hearing his prayer. However, there is enough in him to discern the call of Samuel. The lamp has not gone out. Time for change. Some always suffer in a time of change. Eli surely suffered; nonetheless he counselled Samuel about God. Finally, he said "It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him." (1 Sam 3:18). However, if Israel must have a king, so too will God provide prophets to keep those kings honest. Few kings were good and even Samuel had many problems with his protégé, Saul.

Eli advised Samuel on the discernment process. "Here I am, for you called me." (1 Sam 3:9). This threefold call of Samuel and his eventual hearing the call makes the story a favorite of many in recruitment for evangelization. However, in using the story, attention needs to be given to both the wider sociological and historical contexts and the personal/individual. Sufficient markers along the way indicate that although young, Samuel is not without some awareness of the times in which he lives. On the personal, no one goes uncalled, unsummoned. Naming one's self purpose is an important part of growing up and that sense of purpose can be nurtured on a diet of knowing the world into which I have been born. The call stories in John's Gospel exude a sense of place and relationship. Nathanael probably laughs now at the irony in his put-down of Nazareth: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (1:46) Friendship and family are also to be considered along with place as factors impacting on how we come to name our purpose in living our Christian life. People often find a new or renewed purpose in life when it comes time as they say, "to give back." There is also the adventure of giving oneself plain and simple, of accepting the invitation to "come and see," (John 1:39). Love at first sight.

People want to live a purposeful life. The adventuresome allure of Isis some years ago to draw young people from around the world into the service of the Caliphate took account of this willingness to give. But not all looked before they leapt. Paul invitation to look before we leap in terms of our embodied existence is of great relevance in a time of human trafficking. The ultimate purpose of our body, claims Paul, is the relationship that is resurrection. Every relationship we have as embodied spirits is towards personal transformation into what we are called to be as God raises us by his power (1 Cor 6:14; Philippians 3:10,21). No better criterion to use when naming your purpose in life than to discern your intention over against the desire to be raised in glory forever. Behold "You are not your own!" (1Cor 6:19) as context for "Speak, Lord I am listening."

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