

For you pun lovers:

A sign on a blinds and curtain truck: BLIND MAN DRIVING

In a Podiatrist's office: TIME WOUNDS ALL HEELS

At an Optometrist's Office: IF YOU DON'T SEE WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

On a Plumber's Truck: WE REPAIR WHAT YOUR HUSBAND FIXED.

On another Plumber's Truck: DON'T SLEEP WITH A DRIP. CALL YOUR PLUMBER.

On a Septic Tank Truck: YESTERDAY'S MEALS ON WHEELS

I was mentioning to a friend that sometimes I awaken at night and then find it difficult to get back to sleep. He asked me if I knew WHY I awoke. I didn't, and the days after these sleepless nights are a bit of a challenge to be my usual sweet, ever patient, gentle and kind, loving, serving self! Ooh I'm making MYSELF sick! My friend said it's because God wanted to talk with me. And he pointed to this text from the Book of Samuel which we just heard: "God woke up Samuel in order to talk to him. Why do you think that the Holy One won't speak to you in your sleep? Do you think that God can't operate like that anymore?" (Adapted from Morton Kelsey, SET YOUR HEARTS ON THE GREATEST GIFT, p. 117). I'm embarrassed to tell you that I had never thought of it this way. It certainly gives a whole new perspective to our sleepless nights as we age....God wants to talk with us. Maybe has a job for us.

There's a lot going on in today's liturgy with both our first reading and our gospel text. In many ways, these 2 readings together put before us the great life question: "What are you looking for?" Or as the poet Mary Oliver put it: "What do you plan to do with your one, wonderful life?" Put another way, the readings ask, "What do you and God want to do with the life you have been given?"

Today's readings invite us to consider the macro and micro dimensions of our personal vocations. The idea of vocation brings us to the heart of our relationship with God: it is based on the faith assumption that everything we do finds its meaning with reference to God. The macro refers to the big, overarching life decision each one of us makes: choice of career, spouse, way of life. The talents God has given us, combined with our deepest desires and the needs of our times, lead us to discern the macro choices for how to live our lives here on this earth – this is our vocation. Those choices set the context for all our micro decisions, decisions about our daily opportunities to contribute to the building up of God's reign of love in our often loveless world.

Today's gospel invites us to share the adventure of vocation with 2 of John the Baptist's disciples. They thought they had found the teacher who would give them the answers they sought. Then that teacher pointed to another, someone they did not know, and said, "Behold the Lamb of God." John the Baptist loved them enough that their fulfillment mattered more to him than their companionship. His utter lack of egotism inspired them to try to catch up with Jesus as He walked along. That was when Jesus turned to them and asked the most important question of their life: "What are you looking for?"

They answered with both a statement and a question. They made their statement by calling him 'Rabbi,' acknowledging that they were looking to Him as a teacher. Their question "Where are you staying?"

was a way of saying, “We want to know more?” The Greek word for ‘staying,’ ‘menein,’ has profound implications, and is a recurring theme of John’s gospel. It means ‘to remain’ or ‘to stay with,’ and in John’s Gospel it also describes the divine dwelling within a person, like the relationship that Jesus has with the Father. In Jn 14:10, Jesus tells the disciples ‘DO you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me?the Father REMAINS in me...” and 15:4: “REMAIN (ABIDE) in me, and I in you...” (AT HOME WITH THE WORD, 2018, p. 37)

The human heart was made for love; the human heart seeks love; it’s the way we have been imprinted by our God-who-is-love. And we will always seek more until we encounter the great source of all love. It was the disciples desire for more that nudged them onto the road behind Jesus.

“Come and you will see,” was the invitation into the relationship. When the Gospel tells us it was around 4 in the afternoon, the implication is that the 2 disciples went home with Jesus, ate, and spent the evening. We could call this the day of their ‘first Communion.’ It was the first time they heard Jesus talk about His vocation, His dreams and His mission. It was the first time they broke bread with Him. The Gospel lets us know that they were changed forever by their encounter with Him.

And as so often happens when we have had a life-changing experience, we have to share it. Our patron, Andrew, goes and gets his brother Simon. “We have found the Messiah” he announces, but obviously didn’t yet know what that fully meant. I love that line. “We have found the Messiah” and it takes us a lifetime to figure out all that this means in our own lives. We get married, decide to be a businessperson, doctor, parent, plumber or priest, but we then spend our lives unfolding the reality of what that really means. Which brings us back to the macro and micro dimensions of vocation. Now and then, we make macro decisions about vocation, decisions that set us on the particular path we think we are called to, a path that we think will lead us to know and serve God. But the macro decisions have to be enfolded in our daily activities, micro choices to be faithful, moments of taking the risk of doing and following through with what we really believe to be right, even in the face of criticism or pain or cost or embarrassment.

Today’s liturgy asks, “What are you looking for?” We respond to that question through all our choices, large and small. As people baptized and thus consecrated to God, we also must look to God and ask, “What are YOU looking for?” God responds through the Scriptures and the needs of our times, even getting us awake at night to talk to us! It is ours to decide if we want to accept the invitation to come and see – and be changed forever. (Adapted from CELEBRATION, 14 January 2018, p 18-19)

Second, once we realize what we are called to do, once we have made the macro decisions, we have a direction and purpose. But it requires constant effort and a lot of hard work to remain faithful on the path we have chosen – or should I say the path that has been chosen for us.....It requires constant listening for those voices in the night – and throughout the day – voices where God is asking us to be generous, forgiving, compassionate, kind, encouraging, and faithful to what we once promised in our baptism. In other words, to be His disciples. The story of Samuel offers a great type or model, and has 6 major lessons for us. Here are the 6 – but don’t go bonkers – they will be quick!

First, Samuels’ initial confusion as to who was calling illustrates the fact that calls from God are not always immediately discernible as such. How do I KNOW I’m supposed to follow this path or that? God’s call always requires prayer and further reflection.

Second, the repetitiveness of God’s calling to Samuel assures us that even if we are unable – or not ready – or unwilling – to discern God’s call, God does not desist. The Hound of Heaven, as Francis Thompson’s

famous poem calls God, will repeatedly call out to us, despite our efforts to block His call or ignore it. He wants us with Him, and He is relentless in His loving pursuit of us.

Third, the setting of Samuel's call – at night, while he slept – indicates that God may call at any time, in any place and during any human activity. Forget about waiting for God to knock you off your figurative high horse like He did with St. Paul, or even vocally call out to us – His call is there for us if we are simply open to hearing it.

Fourth, the fact that Samuel runs to his mentor, Eli, for clarification suggests that we often need help from others in discerning and responding to God's call. Here's where good spouses help one another to be more loving and faithful, good friends encourage goodness and truth, and families that are healthy produce members who contribute to society rather than selfish little clods always asking, "What's in it for me?"

Fifth, the description of a very young Samuel growing to maturity in the presence of God underscores the power of grace to sustain whoever responds to God's call – at every age, in every moment, for every day of our lives.

Sixth, the effectiveness of Samuel's ministry (v. 19: "The Lord did not permit any word of his to be without effect") reassures those who are answering God's call that our active cooperation with God can yield astounding results, despite our unworthiness. (CELEBRATION, January 2000, p. 25)

My third and final point. I'm afraid that too often too much of religion is just talk. Little action. We profess faith but never actually live it out. We come to church – but little changes in us – or our world. Though we are fairly faithful churchgoers, do we live any differently than people who don't go to church at all? And if not, then what's the point? Do we actually have a sense that we HAVE a vocation – a specific thing to do in this world for God? Or is religion just an exercise in words once a week in a church? Is it just fire insurance to keep us out of hell? What a horrible reduction of the life that God is offering to us. Remember Christ said: "I have come that you may have life – and have it to the full!" In the end, we have to live life out – jump in and allow God to take us often to places where we would never have even dreamed. It is said a great Zen teacher asked an initiate to sit by a stream until he heard all the water had to teach him. After days of bending his mind around the scene, a small monkey happened by, and, in one seeming bound of joy, splashed about in the stream. The initiate wept and returned to his teacher, who admonished him lovingly, 'The monkey heard – and acted. You just watched.'

With the best of intentions we often build false careers of studying the river without ever getting wet, of going to church but never becoming a disciple. How many go to endless Bible studies – but never actually DO anything for others? We can keep all the rules, we can say all our prayers without ever loving God or anyone else, and even be pretty miserable to the people around us, all the while thinking that we are good Catholics. We can count our money without ever spending it on anyone but ourselves, or contribute nothing to the church or charity, ignore the poor, and still think we are good Catholics because we come to church every week. But that's just a ruse. It's like playing music or making love skillfully without ever feeling the music or the passion.

The apprentice was brought to tears because the monkey, slapping and yapping its way in the river, had landed in a moment of joy, and the apprentice knew that all his reverence and devotion and meditation hadn't brought him the joy of a monkey.

The river, of course, is the ongoing moment of our living out of God's call. It is the current that calls us to inhabit our lives. And no matter how close we come, no matter how much we get from coming to church

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or following the rules, nothing will open us to joy but entering the stream. Mark Nepo writes: “I once was on a screened-in-porch on a lake I used to visit every summer for 20 years. My friend and I were watching it rain, as we had done countless times over the years. Suddenly, like that simple and beautiful monkey, my friend bounded up, slapped the screen door open, stripped off his clothes, and jumped into the rain-filled lake.

“I watched like the apprentice, feeling the pain of always being dry, and then I shed my clothes and jumped in too. There we were: in the center of the lake, water from above in our mouths, in our eyes, pelting us, water entering water, lives entering their living. Each pelt of rain, on us and in the lake, uttering.....joy, joy, joy.” (this last section adapted from THE BOOK OF AWAKENING, Mark Nepo, p. 211-212). We need to jump into the water my friends – to live out our faith and love of God – and taste the joy He means for us. Amen.