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Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

**Weekend of Sunday, January 14, 2023**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany/Lectionary 2/Year B**

**First Reading: 1 Samuel 3:1-20**

**Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20**

**Gospel Reading: John 1:43-51**

**Sermon Title: “Answering the Call: A Journey into Discipleship”**

## **Theme**

*All the baptized have a calling in God’s world. God calls not just pastors and deacons but also the youngest child, like Samuel. The story of the calling of Nathanael plays with the idea of place. Nathanael initially dismisses Jesus because he comes from Nazareth. But where we come from isn’t important; it’s where—or rather whom—we come to. Jesus refers to Jacob, who had a vision in a place he called “the house of God, and . . . the gate of heaven” (Gen. 28:17). Jesus says he himself is the place where Nathanael will meet God.*

## **Texts:**

### **First Reading: 1 Samuel 3:1-10**

<sup>1</sup>Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

<sup>2</sup>At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; <sup>3</sup>the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. <sup>4</sup>Then the LORD called, “Samuel! Samuel!” and he said, “Here I am!” <sup>5</sup>and ran to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” So he went and lay down. <sup>6</sup>The LORD called again, “Samuel!” Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” <sup>7</sup>Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. <sup>8</sup>The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. <sup>9</sup>Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

<sup>10</sup>Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!”  
And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

### **Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20**

<sup>12</sup>“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. <sup>13</sup>“Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food,” and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. <sup>14</sup>And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. <sup>15</sup>Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! <sup>16</sup>Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, “The two shall be one flesh.” <sup>17</sup>But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. <sup>18</sup>Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. <sup>19</sup>Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? <sup>20</sup>For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

### **Gospel: John 1:43-51**

<sup>43</sup>The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” <sup>44</sup>Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. <sup>45</sup>Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” <sup>46</sup>Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” <sup>47</sup>When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” <sup>48</sup>Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” <sup>49</sup>Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” <sup>50</sup>Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” <sup>51</sup>And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

## Sermon

Today we embark on a journey of inspiration and revelation as we explore the theme of answering the call to discipleship. In the First Reading from 1 Samuel and the Gospel Reading from John, we discover two stories of divine calls, responsive hearts, and the transformative power of saying "yes" to the call of discipleship. As we delve into these passages, let us open our hearts to the stirring conviction that God still calls us today, inviting us to follow Him as devoted disciples.

Our first scriptural destination is the Old Testament, where we encounter the young boy, Samuel, serving in the temple under the guidance of the priest Eli. In the stillness of the night, God calls out to Samuel. At first, Samuel misunderstands the voice, thinking it is Eli who is calling him. Yet, after Eli recognizes the divine nature of the call, he instructs Samuel on how to respond.

This narrative illustrates the innocence and openness of a young heart to the call of God. Samuel's eagerness to respond, saying, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening," sets an exemplary model for us as we navigate our own journeys of discipleship.

Speaking of my call to ordained ministry, I did not hear a human voice like Samuel did. Sometimes I wish I had. I think it would have been easier to respond. My call was like a steady drip of little notions and nudges. When I think back and wonder what would have happened if I had responded earlier, I realize that God's timing is perfect. There were experiences that God wanted me to have before I was to serve his beloved church. And here I would like to add that "call" is not a once-and-done kind of experience but an ongoing journey that requires attention to God's continual call.

In our lives, God's call may not always be a thunderous proclamation like the Apostle Paul or Martin Luther had. Often, it comes as a gentle whisper in the quiet moments – or even less – a notion or a nudge, as I mentioned. Are we attuned to the voice of God amid the noise of our daily lives? Are our hearts, like Samuel's, ready to respond with openness and humility?

Transitioning to the New Testament, we find ourselves on the shores of Galilee, witnessing the call of the first two disciples by Jesus himself. In John 1, we

encounter the calling of Philip and Nathanael. Philip responds to the invitation of Jesus, saying, "Follow me," and Nathanael, initially skeptical, becomes a disciple after encountering the divine knowledge of Jesus.

The narrative unfolds as Nathanael marvels at Jesus' knowledge of him, exclaiming, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus, in turn, promises even greater revelations to come.

This passage reveals the simplicity and power of the call to discipleship. Jesus beckons us with the same invitation: "Follow me." Are we, like Philip, willing to heed the call of Jesus and embark on the journey of discipleship? Can we open our hearts to the revelation that Jesus, the Son of God, knows us intimately and invites us to join Him in a transformative relationship?

As we reflect on the calls of Samuel and the disciples in John, let us explore the dynamics of discipleship that emerge from these narratives:

**Listening and Responding:** Discipleship begins with a receptive heart that listens for the voice of God. As in Samuel's case, God's call often requires our attentive ears and a willingness to respond.

**Openness and Humility:** Samuel's simple declaration, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening," reflects an open heart and humble spirit. Discipleship flourishes when we approach God with humility, acknowledging our dependence on His guidance.

**Following Jesus:** The call to discipleship echoed in Jesus' invitation to Philip and Nathanael, is an invitation to follow Him. Discipleship is a journey of metaphorically walking alongside Jesus, a lifetime of learning from Him and emulating His life.

**Encountering Christ:** Nathanael's encounter with Jesus, who knew him intimately, highlights the personal nature of discipleship. As disciples, we experience the transformative power of encountering Christ in our lives, deepening our relationship with Him.

The calls to discipleship in Samuel and John are not isolated incidents but reflections of a continuous, divine call that resounds through the ages. God calls

each one of us, inviting us into a life of discipleship that is marked by our listening and responding to God; our openness and humility to answer; following the example of Jesus; which will lead us to encountering Him as Christ, God's anointed one and our savior.

### Theme Slide

As we navigate our discipleship journey, we must be attuned to the ongoing call of God in our lives. The call may come in moments of prayer, through the wisdom of Scripture, or in the gentle notions and nudges of the Holy Spirit. Discipleship is not a one-time event but a lifelong commitment to walk with Jesus and grow in our relationship with Him.

While the call to discipleship is transformative and inviting, it is essential to acknowledge the challenges that may arise on this journey. Discipleship requires sacrifice, humility, and a willingness to surrender our own plans and desires for the sake of following Christ.

Zion's Nominating Committee is completing its work. If you've never been on the Nominating Committee let me tell you how it is supposed to work. The members of the committee review the task ahead of them – all the leadership positions that need to be filled. And then they pray that God will raise up candidates that will lead the Congregation to accomplish His will. Then candidates are discerned and assignments are made to make contact with the candidates. I am often surprised and disappointed that after the Committee faithfully does its work the candidate turns down the opportunity to serve. Really? You are saying “no” to the six members of the committee who prayerfully sought the LORD and the LORD led them to ask you to consider the honor of serving in a position of leadership in this two-hundred-plus-year-old congregation?

**Surrendering Control:** Discipleship challenges us to surrender control and trust in God's plans. Samuel's willingness to accept God's message, even when it was difficult to deliver, exemplifies this surrender.

**Navigating Skepticism:** Like Nathanael, we may encounter skepticism or doubt along our discipleship journey. It is crucial to bring our doubts to Jesus, allowing Him to reveal Himself to us in ways that dispel uncertainty.

**Embracing Obedience:** Samuel's obedience to God's call and Nathanael's response to Jesus' invitation underscores the importance of obedience in discipleship. Our commitment to following Jesus includes aligning our lives with His teachings and commands.

### Theme Slide

As we face the challenges of discipleship, it is essential to cling to the promises embedded in God's call. Just as Samuel became a great prophet and Nathanael witnessed incredible revelations, discipleship holds promises of transformation, intimacy with God, and the joy of participating in God's redemptive work.

**Transformation:** Discipleship is a transformative journey. As we follow Jesus, He shapes our character, molds our hearts, and conforms us to His image. The process of transformation is ongoing, it is never complete on this side of eternity, leading us to become more like Christ each day until we are called home.

**Intimacy with God:** Discipleship deepens our intimacy with God. Through prayer, study of Scripture, and communion with the Holy Spirit, we draw closer to the heart of God. Our relationship with Him becomes a source of comfort, guidance, and joy.

**Participation in God's Plan:** Discipleship invites us to participate in God's redemptive plan for the world. Just as Samuel played a crucial role in God's message to Israel, and the disciples became foundational figures in the early Church, our lives as disciples contribute to God's unfolding story of His love, grace, and mercy.

### **Raisin' the Bar Challenge**

Personally, I find these two stories inspirational. I wonder if you do. If you are not inclined toward obedience to God I could imagine these stories just add to your frustration – the frustration of that nagging feeling that God is calling you to more. God is still calling His people today, inviting us into a transformative relationship as devoted disciples of Jesus Christ.

My prayer is that we listen with open hearts, respond with humility and obedience, and embrace the challenges of discipleship with faith and trust in God's promises.

The call to discipleship is an invitation to a life of purpose, intimacy with God, and active participation in His redemptive work.

As we answer the call to discipleship, may our lives reflect the transformative power of following Jesus, and may our journey inspire others to embark on their own path of discipleship.

### **Prayer**

You invite us, O God, to follow Your call and journey with You, walking in Your ways, following the example of Your Son and our Lord Jesus. Help us to listen to Your urgings with obedient hearts, and transform us to be more like Him, so that in all we do we may please You, and make Your name known. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen