

God's calling; our vocation

[1 Samuel 3:1-10\(11-20\)](#)

[John 1:43-51](#)

When I was in my late teens and wondering what to do with my life I was told by lovely people that God's will for me was clearly laid out in the Bible. I was frustrated by that because no matter which way I read the Bible it did not tell me the answer to my burning question: what was I to do with my life?

We tend to think about Christian vocation as being something big. We want to have a Samuel experience. We want God to send us an email with clear instructions, "Your mission for today is..." But as with most things in the Christian life, it's really a lot more subtle and rather more difficult. Our vocation is to be transformed by the renewal of our minds into Christ-like beings. Nothing more, nothing less. What we do along the way is less important, as long as it is congruent with that underlying vocation.

God's plan is for the whole of Creation to be reconciled with its Creator. I wonder if it's a bit like a boomerang – God created the world and endowed creatures with free will, and is waiting in joyful expectancy to see how it is turning round and coming back to her.

If God's plan is for the whole of Creation to be redeemed then our role, our vocation, is to participate in that drama. I am sure you have heard it said, "How do you make God laugh? Tell him your plans." It's a dig at the way the plans we make so often go awry... but it also points out that as Christians we get to try to discern what God is doing and get on board with her plans.

Not long after I was trying to get the Bible to tell me whether to be a social worker or a teacher or whatever, I became sure that God's will

extended to every part of my life including my clothes. I would pray about what I was to wear every day. That was quite exhausting, especially as I could never be sure that I was getting it right. That phase didn't last long. Yet it has taken me much, much longer to understand the underlying truth that vocation and stewardship are intricately linked. What I do with all that God has given me is how I live out my vocation to be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit into the person who God created me to be.

That includes how I care for my body. Many of us have older bodies which require more care than when we were younger. Our bodies are a God-given gift and the way we care for them and the attention we give them are part of the way we live out our calling to be stewards of Creation. There is a long tradition within Christianity of seeing the body as inferior and a temptress which needs to be disciplined and subdued, even to the extent of punishment. Friends, we never see Jesus doing that. In fact, we see him eating and drinking and even allowing his disciples to harvest grain on the Sabbath when they were hungry. We do not need to discipline our bodies but to befriend them and care for them so that they do not get in the way of living out our vocations in the world.

God may not be deeply concerned about whether I wear blue or green on any particular day, but God is concerned that I understand that loving my neighbor as myself means loving myself in a healthy way – not an ego-based megalomaniac kind of way but in humility – understanding what my gifts and challenge are and loving myself because that is who God made me. If God loves us unconditionally, who are we to say that we are not good enough, who are we to argue with God's assessment of ourselves as beautiful and beloved?

As God's beautiful and beloved daughters and sons we can be confident that even when everything is falling apart around us, as from time to times it surely does, God is holding on tight. And God is still calling to us in the night, "Samuel, Samuel.." or whatever your name is. God is

calling us to live life as if God is real and as if the God in all life actually matters. God is calling us to the journey of inner transformation and outer service. This is more than altruism – service is loving God in your neighbor however you express it.

Service may not be cooking meals for the hungry or writing letters to the editor – service may be caring for your neighbor, or practicing an artistic gift – writing, painting, making music. These things are service to God as well as to neighbor because as you exercise the gifts you have been given so you add to the creative process which is God’s project in Creation and so you bless.

It can be confusing to know which gifts to emphasize, especially when you have a major life change like retirement or loss of a loved one, or a pandemic hits. The old ways no longer function as well or are completely unavailable.

The key here is to remember that our basic vocation is to allow ourselves to be transformed by the Holy Spirit and reconciled to God. Everything else flows from that... our stewardship of our time, of our bodies, of our abilities, of our relationships.

I often wonder what Nathaniel was doing under the fig tree in today’s gospel reading. Was he engaged in prayer or some other spiritual practice – like Buddha and the Bodhi tree? Was he resting in the shade? Was he watching Jesus from a distance? Whatever he was doing, Jesus could see that he was living his vocation. “When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.””

Jesus already knew Nathaniel before Philip called him to go with them to Galilee. God already knew you before you were physically born. God’s calling to you is primary. Everything else, including the church, is

secondary. And for us as a community of Jesus followers, God's calling to us is primary. Our vocation individually is to be transformed by the renewal of our minds; our vocation corporately is to become a full manifestation of the Body of Christ in this place.

And we can be sure that when we remember that that is our calling, God's blessing will follow. God knew St. Benedict's before we even had our first organizing meeting. God knows us now. God knows how difficult this time is for us and yet God is still beckoning us on the path of Love.

As God is love so we are called to be Love. Let us live out our vocations with joy and perhaps we too "will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."