

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 238

Sunday 14th January 2024

'Virtually Church but with some way to go...'

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

Scripture Passages

1 Samuel 3: 1-10

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.

² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³ 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.

⁴ Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" ⁵ 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.

⁶ 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."

⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

⁸ 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. ⁹ 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.

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

John 1: 43-51

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.”

⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ 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.”

⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

Philip said to him, “Come and see.”

⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!”

⁴⁸ Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?”

Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

⁵⁰ Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” ⁵¹ 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.”

Reflection

‘Then the LORD called, “Samuel! Samuel!” and he said, “Here I am!”‘

God knows our name. This is a sign of the personal relationship which God wants to build with us. To be called by our name makes us feel valued, known and respected. On the other hand, how do we feel when our names are mixed up with a completely different person?

In my numerous failed attempts to pass my driving test, I had a driving instructor who knew me as Mr Raymond Smith. When we got to the end of one of our lessons his standard summary of my efforts was the comment 'Not one of our better days, Mr Smith.'

Now I could live with this not least because it helped me to distance myself from a sense of responsibility concerning my driving. It was, after all, only Mr Raymond Smith who was driving. On the other hand, it would have caused me some unhappiness if people close to me had addressed me in this way.

So, it is important to remember that God knows our name. God calls Samuel by name and this is the start of Samuel's extraordinarily important ministry as a prophet.

To understand this account of Samuel's call we need first of all to know something about Samuel's background. His mother Hannah had been childless for many years. However, God had answered her fervent prayers by giving her a son. As a mark of gratitude to God, Hannah had offered her son Samuel as an assistant to the priest Eli who had supported her in her prayers. Eli was in the position both of a mentor and of an adopted father figure to Samuel.

It is indeed a source of great comfort and encouragement for us to remember that God knows and calls us by name. And yet God's knowledge is also a challenge to us. For, as God calls Samuel by name so Samuel discovers the great and costly purpose which God has for his life.

In fact, it takes Samuel a while to recognise that it is God who is calling. At first being only young and having no experience of God, he thinks that it is Eli who calls him in order to ask him for some assistance.

This is a depiction of the process both of growing in faith and of growing up. It does not happen all at once. God calls Samuel repeatedly by name and, in the end, it is Eli who helps him to understand that it is in fact God who is calling him.

For Samuel, this means that he needs to make the transition between looking to his adopted father Eli as his source of spiritual authority and having a direct and personal relationship with God in which he himself seeks God for guidance and direction.

When Samuel is ready to seek God directly, he responds (as Eli has instructed him to do) simply by saying the words, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.'

This is a declaration of complete and unconditional dependence on God. Samuel does not know in advance what God will say. However, before God speaks, he needs to be available to God and to lay himself open to following what God says to him, no matter what direction this may take him in. However, at the time he does not know what direction this might be or how difficult the path that he is being asked to follow might be.

Perhaps this is just as well. For, once Samuel has offered himself to God in this way, the message that he is given is indeed very difficult and challenging. Eli has been a mentor and a father figure to Samuel. And yet God tells Samuel how Eli's sons have been unfaithful and how consequently, Eli and his house will experience their downfall and destruction. We can only imagine how difficult it must have been for Samuel to pass this message on to his mentor Eli.

This is a reminder to all of us that following God's call will be costly in ways that we cannot imagine when we first say to God 'Speak, for your servant is listening.'

Our gospel this morning is also an account of God's calling. How is this call communicated and received?

The account of the way that Jesus calls Philip seems, on the surface at least, to be very straightforward and not to involve a protracted period of struggle. Of course, Philip may have been through such a process privately and in advance so that when Jesus finds him, he is ready simply to trust and follow the call of Jesus.

However, Philip still needs to work out and recognise who Jesus is, that Jesus is the Messiah to whom Moses and the prophets point. We do not know quite how this process of understanding worked and indeed perhaps Philip had been going through a period of inner preparation before he met Jesus and so was ready to express this understanding when Jesus called him.

But, more than knowing us by name, God also knows our inner character, our hearts. So, when Jesus sees Philip's companion Nathanael coming towards him he says 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit'.

Nathanael had seemed very sceptical and unresponsive towards Jesus, asking scornfully when he was first told about Jesus 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' However, when he realises that Jesus can see into the depth of his inner being and can affirm what he sees there, his attitude immediately begins to change.

And so, he asks Jesus 'Where did you get to know me?' To which Jesus's response is 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.' The reference to a fig tree may be to a place of prayer but in any event this

Jesus' deep insight into Nathanael's heart is clearly supernatural and God given.

And this knowledge provokes Nathanael's initial response of faith in Christ as the Son of God and King of Israel. However, this will not be the end point of his journey in faith. Jesus tells him that he needs to and will go further. Greater revelation will come to Nathanael as he grows in his faith. He will recognise the divine nature of Jesus even more clearly as he sees heaven opening and the angels descending and ascending on the Son of Man.

So, just as with Samuel so with Nathanael, the account of his call comes in stages in which he becomes increasingly aware of and responsive to his vocation.

As we reflect on these various accounts of God's call to Samuel, Philip and Nathanael we will be reminded of the way in which God has called us and how we have responded to God. Our call may have come to us in a very simple and direct way as is the case with Philip. Or it may have come as the culmination of a long and complex process of change and transformation. This is more reminiscent of the accounts of how Samuel and Nathanael come to respond to their call.

But, in whatever way our call has come to us we will be reminded that God's knowledge of our name and inner character is both exciting and challenging. For at the point when we realise that God is calling us by name or that God knows our hearts, we do not know what God will ask us to do. Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. This is rather like giving God a blank cheque on which He can write what He chooses to. But though this is indeed a challenge to us it is also a starting point for a journey of spiritual adventure and growth which will last for the rest of our lives and even beyond our lives into eternity.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- Responding to God's call
- Facing the New Year with hope and expectation
- For continuing and new conflicts including those in the Yemen, Israel, Gaza and the Ukraine
- Those whom we know who are facing illnesses of all kinds and have recently been bereaved
- For Elliscombe House in Higher Holton and its residents
- For teachers and children of North Cadbury church school in their new term

Hymn

One of the hymns set for this Sunday is 'Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?'

Services for this week and next

Sunday 14 th January	9.30 am Communion, Galhampton
Sunday 14 th January	9.30 am Communion, North Cheriton
Sunday 14 th January	9.30 am Matins, Blackford
Sunday 14 th January	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Holton
Sunday 21 st January	9.30 am Communion, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 21 st January	11.00 am Communion, Maperton
Sunday 21 st January	11.00 am Sunday Worship, North Cadbury
Sunday 21 st January	4.00 pm Evensong, Yarlington

Excalibur online

The December and January edition of Excalibur has now been published online at camelotparishes.co.uk. It contains details of Camelot people, a record of baptisms, weddings and funerals undertaken through the church in the Camelot Parishes.

The Parish Office

If Rob is not in the Office during normal office hours please contact him via email (office@camelotparishes.org.uk) or on 01749 850934.

Growing as a worshipper, a servant and a family

*We pray that 'we might live in love,
as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us'*

(Ephesians 5: 2)