

## **1 Samuel 3:1-11**

<sup>1</sup> The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.

<sup>2</sup> One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. <sup>3</sup> The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the LORD, where the ark of God was. <sup>4</sup> Then the LORD called Samuel.

Samuel answered, "Here I am." <sup>5</sup> And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down.

<sup>6</sup> Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

"My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down."

<sup>7</sup> Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

<sup>8</sup> A third time the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. <sup>9</sup> So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

<sup>10</sup> The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!"

Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

<sup>11</sup> And the LORD said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle.

## **Psalm 139: 1-6;13-18**

<sup>1</sup> You have searched me, LORD,  
and you know me.

<sup>2</sup> You know when I sit and when I rise;  
you perceive my thoughts from afar.

<sup>3</sup> You discern my going out and my lying down;  
you are familiar with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup> Before a word is on my tongue  
you, LORD, know it completely.

<sup>5</sup> You hem me in behind and before,

and you lay your hand upon me.

<sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
too lofty for me to attain.

<sup>13</sup> For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

<sup>14</sup> I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful,  
I know that full well.

<sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you  
when I was made in the secret place,  
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

<sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my unformed body;  
all the days ordained for me were written in your book  
before one of them came to be.

<sup>17</sup> How precious to me are your thoughts, God!  
How vast is the sum of them!

<sup>18</sup> Were I to count them,  
they would outnumber the grains of sand—  
when I awake, I am still with you.

## John 1:43-51

<sup>43</sup> The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.”

<sup>44</sup> Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. <sup>45</sup> Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

<sup>46</sup> “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked.

“Come and see,” said Philip.

<sup>47</sup> When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”

<sup>48</sup> “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked.

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

<sup>49</sup> Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.”

<sup>50</sup> Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.” <sup>51</sup> He then added, “Very truly I tell you, you will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on’ the Son of Man.”

“Called to and Prepared for Discipleship”

Lisa Durkee Abbott

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

“I refuse to believe the idea that the “is-ness” of man’s *present* state makes him morally incapable of reaching up for the “oughtness” that forever confronts him.” The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, martyred saint and prophet of the church and of our nation said this, and if English had been his first language, I think that Jesus could have said it, too. You see, tying ourselves to Jesus in the way that is asked of us in discipleship means always and forever reaching for our oughtness. What “ought” to be in us and for us may sometimes seem beyond us, though, and for a variety of reasons. Still, Jesus sees it. God, who made us, sees us, finds us “precious,” as we hear in today’s Psalm, and wants for us ever greater things.

This last statement is all that you will hear from a lot of very prominent preachers. They know that what we *want* to hear has everything to do with our getting what we deserve, and we know we always deserve great things, right? I smile to say so, because while I believe with my whole heart that God wants great things for us, I also know that God asks us to follow Jesus. We are meant to be Jesus' disciples. That means, in its most simple translation, that we are to be students of Jesus. So, I guess for us, that seems pretty simple, right? Well, it is not always true for me. Sure, I can read the manual, the Bible, and feel as though I get it right if I feel like I am loving people well, but there is a whole lot more to loving than sharing a kind word. Loving well has a lot to do with much larger issues than you and I. Loving well has a lot to do with trying to obey the prophet Micah, who reminds us to “act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.” Sometimes, to follow Jesus feels very, very difficult.

The idea of following brings up a number of images for me. The first is of a mother duck, leading without even looking back, and with all of her ducklings in an ordered line behind her. Picture here, the wonderful story by Robert McClusky, *Make Way for Ducklings*. Still, not *all* ducklings follow along this way. There are stories about the errant baby duck, of course, and we may more closely associate with the kind of following that has us gazing at the stars or looking so closely at what is on the ground in front of us that we miss where our leader has led, and we end up on the other path—the one that leads to a dead end we didn't know was there.

I like to think of following in a very different way, one that I may need to spell out for a lot of you, though for those of you who follow motor sports, this will be familiar. Race car drivers and bicycle racers know a lot about following. There are times when it is far better to be a follower in a race than it is to lead a pack. By following closely behind the leader, you get to do what's called drafting. The leader is the first one to meet the force of wind that would slow them down, and as a result, those who follow closely behind her or him can “draft” behind, using less power to travel the same distance. This is certainly true of bicycle racers, whose power isn't gasoline but their own legs. In bad weather, the leader also takes the first of the rain, and if a drafting follower is close enough on the heels of the

leader, can remain virtually untouched by the water, depending on its angle. I learned about drafting, or what is sometimes called hypermiling, the first time that I drove cross country, when one of the women in the group of five women, four dogs and three vehicles in our caravan would tailgate behind an 18-wheeler in order to save fuel. I learned it, but I didn't follow her lead. That's a dangerous practice she had cultivated while racing stock cars, but my own reflexes weren't and still aren't quite as keen.

Sometimes, I think that being a disciple of Jesus, being a follower of Jesus is very much like drafting, and here I would like you to keep in mind auto racing, or maybe cycling; or maybe the kind of beautiful V formation that we see in birds, who also use a kind of drafting as they migrate with the seasons. For us, Jesus takes the lead, and we follow behind. Jesus makes our journey easier, by being the first one to meet the wind and rain, so that we don't feel it quite so much, and we make easier headway as a result. Jesus, our teacher and our savior, takes it on the nose so that we can race uphill toward the very best that God wants for us. "Takes it on the nose?" No, Jesus lived and died, so that instead of dying, we also get to live eternally. Now that's a kind of drafting I will gladly hurry in close behind.

And we can do that. We can glide along in God's grace, and there is nothing absolutely required of our discipleship, other than to believe that Jesus has done the work of redemption on our behalf. I don't know about you, but that is a lovely invitation, but not the kind of party whose invitation I am most likely to accept. I learn best by doing. I enjoy most by engaging. And engage we can, in our Christian discipleship; in our following Jesus. We can think about both the persons of today's scripture lessons. Samuel was invited in a whispered, midnight voice, and finally, with Eli's prompting, he answered. Then, in answering, his life became a model for others' faith. We know about him as a model for our faith—for the doing of it, not just for the believing in it.

Philip and Nathanael are invited into discipleship by Jesus himself, and they don't respond in quite the same way. Philip responds with alacrity; he jumps at the chance to walk with Jesus. Nathanael is more skeptical, yet when he makes up his mind, he is sure and he is committed. Invitations are like that, aren't they? And so are the responses. Sometimes we take a while to respond, and sometimes our

engagement in the party looks very different. A party of one person who is a boisterous soul is not a party. A larger party in which only one person speaks is still a boring party. Yet, the person who is an observer who occasionally offers a word is still a *part* of the party, and often is able to see more than one who is seemingly more actively engaged. What we are talking about this morning isn't just a party, though, it is life in all its *isness* and in all its future possibilities, and you're invited.

You're invited. We're all invited, and we're always invited. Sometimes, we might feel as though we want to say, I got the phone call; I got the engraved written invitation; I have received your emails and your text messages and your call on the can with the string. Sometimes, though, we may think we have gotten the invitation and that we have responded, but we haven't—not really. Sometimes, we hear all the invitations that ring out loudly and clearly, but we've been waiting for the still, small voice of personal whispered naming. What has it been like for you? For my own part, I was a former pastor's kid, and daughter of a choir director growing up. You can bet I went to church regularly, and by that I mean that I went every Sunday unless I was sick. I had no excuse not to in a way, because I lived across the street from the church, even when I was not the pastor's kid. I even went to church through part of my college years, when so many young people take a total break. In my twenties, I found a church and a family away from home, in some of the most lonely times of my life. There's salvation in that. Sure, I went to church, and I think I loved people pretty well, but I still wasn't really a "follower" of Jesus. I was a listener to Jesus.

Let's think again about our analogy of drafting. It's all well and good to follow the leader who breaks the wind and absorbs the rain, but there's no winning the race if you stay behind all the time. Likewise, if you are the lead bird, you are sometimes going to grow tired and need a break. If you are lucky, you will one day see that shifting in leadership in the big V's of migrating birds. It's astounding when we know that it is intentional in that body. No one is left to do all the work; to carry all the load, or all the pain.

Yes, we can be faithful without ever taking the lead, and by God's grace, our faith is enough. This *gift of life* holds its own rewards, and some of them are best

enjoyed from the thick of things, or at the head of the pack. No, not always—that would be exhausting. And we are not all good at the same things. We have different gifts; we have different areas in which we are blessed to be able to lead others until they have learned enough to lighten our load. You may think some days that you have nothing to give. Each one of us is unique, though. One of us is a very good listener, who can hold a story someone needs to share. One of us is an excellent cook, who can provide a meal for other. One of us is a great mechanic, who can offer the timely twist of wrench. One of us is an excellent singer, whose voice will help us reach the places that only sound can help us find. One of us is a loving teacher, whose care and guidance will be the best instructor for us and our children, even as they learn the lessons of the Bible. One of us is an activist, whose energy and dedication to justice remind us that we, too, can vote—with our ballots and with our feet. Oh, there are so many ways that we can serve. I am again reminded of the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who led and who followed in ways that can admire and even model. I would like to end this morning—yes, end this morning—by talking about our greatness again. It is a kind of greatness that you won't read about in the long popular Prayer of Jabez you can buy while waiting in a line at the grocery store; nor, unfortunately, will you hear about this kind of greatness from Joel Osteen or any of the other preachers of prosperity. Sure, we will receive comfort from our God, from our Lord. The greatness we will receive is different from the message that our world wants to give us, though. King wrote, "Everybody can be great. Because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve.... You don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love."

May we all be wonderful disciples of Jesus and of other teachers of love and justice. We are invited to follow! We are invited to serve, and we are invited to lead. We also are invited into blessed, and abundant life in Jesus' name.

Let us pray: Oh, God, help us to act justly, and with mercy, and to walk humbly whether leading or following on our way to loving you.