

A God Who Calls A People – Nate Wieland

1 Samuel 3:1-20; Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1:43-51

Our texts for today are dealing with a God who calls us. God calls Samuel to speak truth to power and confront Eli about his wickedness and God's plan to overthrow him. God in Christ calls Nathanael to himself, asking him to come and follow him. So the meaning of the texts is super plain for our own lives! If you're ever going to sleep and God audibly calls your name, say, *Speak Lord, for your servant is listening*, and God will tell you what He wants you do with your life! And if a friend ever runs up to you and tells you that the one who is written about in the law and by the prophets is out and about, just go follow him! He's probably the perfect image of God, so discerning God's call on your life will not be hard at all. So yeah, that's it, sermon over...

So obviously the texts here aren't that easy to apply to our own lives. And in a time where a lot of people are searching for clarity on what God would have us do, it would be nice if it were that easy. How many times have we wished for an audible or a visible sign from God? As a kid I would do double-takes at a wall while praying that God would write something on it to answer a burning question that I had. I never got anything but weird looks. For a God who delights in being known, He sure seems oddly silent when we're confused about where to go next. But maybe we're confused because we're asking the wrong questions. Maybe instead of, "God, as I come to this fork in the road, do you want me to go left or right?" we ask, "God, there's a homeless man sitting at this fork in the road, do I turn my head or invite him along this journey with me?" Suddenly left and right seem a little inconsequential. And I think that's because God gives us agency for decisions, but is primarily concerned with who we are becoming. Left and right don't matter so much as we become a person that sees a friend in the poor stranger. If we ignore the man and go left we'll have wounded our own soul just as much as if we'd chosen to go right.

In a time where God doesn't speak to us through a voice in the sky, we have to discern his call for us based on an ethic of love that we find in our church tradition, our brothers and sisters, and in our scriptures.

Pope Francis says, "God's word teaches that our brothers and sisters are the prolongation of the incarnation for each of us: 'As you did it to one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it to me' (Mt 25:40). The way we treat others has a transcendent dimension: 'The measure you give will be the measure you get' (Mt 7:2). It corresponds to the mercy which God has shown us: 'Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you ... For the measure you give will be the measure you get back' (Lk 6:36-38). What these passages make clear is the absolute priority of 'going forth from ourselves toward our brothers and sisters' as one of the two great commandments which ground every moral norm and as the clearest sign for discerning spiritual growth in response to God's completely free gift." God's call on our lives is revealed to us in our brothers and sisters. It is revealed often in their example, thinking of those that we look to as role models in the faith, and it is revealed in their need. Following God requires that we put ourselves in step with the pain of our brothers and sisters. If we want to follow Christ well, it cannot be done outside of community with others,

because God has made us for each other, and because each of us is a prolongation of the incarnation to each other and a way in which we receive and experience Christ.

Helping Joe to get around in Taiwan taught me about this. The last night we were there a couple friends of Joe's wanted to take us out to eat at a place where they cook the food in front of you. We approached the restaurant and soon came to find that there were two steps up into the restaurant that we had to ascend, which was hard for Joe. We had to set Joe's walker up on the top step, and I had to put Joe's arm over my shoulder, and I would step as he had to step, and we would push together until we were up the first stair, and then the second to where he could grab his walker. That taught me about what it means to walk with someone in their need—that often we have to slow down, embrace one another, and share a burden that is too much for one to bear on their own. Of course that looks different in every situation, but I think Peterson speaks to that well in his sermon titled, "Love Your Neighbor As Yourself." He says, "Love is the most context-specific act in the entire spectrum of human behavior. There is no human act more dependent on and immersed in immediate context. A dictionary is worthless in understanding and practicing love. Acts of love cannot be canned and then used off the shelf. Every act of love requires creative and personal giving, responding, and serving appropriate to—context specific to—both the person doing the loving and the person being loved. Because of the totally personal, particular, and uniquely contextual community dimensions involved in even the simplest act of love—the circumstantial complexity and inescapably local conditions—there is a sense in which we cannot tell a person how to love, and so our scriptures for the most part don't even try. Instead of explanations or definitions or generalizations, John settles for a name and the story that goes with it: Jesus. 'We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another'. Then he lets us find the particular but always personal and relational way to do it the Jesus way; 'We love because he first loved us.'"

We love because Christ first loved us. Again I want to reiterate that our call as Christians is not a call to action but a call to being. We must be a redeemed people before we are a redeeming people. The resurrection of Christ is the central identifying story from which our love as Christians flows. I had a conversation with a girl at a university who told me that her faith is in the goodness of humans. And that took me aback for a second. I too believe in the goodness of humans. God created them and called them very good. So if we both are acting out of a conviction that humans are good, and our practice looks the same (say we both serve at the food pantry, advocate for better immigration policy, and comfort our friends in their times of struggle), then what separates us? How am I as a Christian different than her as a humanist? Then I began to realize, our faith is not in the goodness of humans, or the hope for justice, or the pursuit of perfection, but it is that the God who created the universe loved the world so much that He became incarnate in Christ, lived among us as a human, was crucified, died, and then resurrected, defeating death and freeing us from sin. That is the people we are called to be—ones who recognize our place in this timeline of salvation, who are (like the Psalmist in psalm 139) overwhelmed by God's great love for us, and compelled by the power of the Holy Spirit to go forth from ourselves towards our brothers and sisters. It is in this realization of our being (as saved people) that we ground our attempts to manifest God's love in the world, in the personal, particular, and uniquely contextual ways in which we go about it. Before we ever are concerned with what God is calling us to do, we should make sure we are in awe of what God has already done.