

So, today we have two stories of people being called,
well, two stories containing three episodes.

In the still watches of the night the boy Samuel hears a voice calling his name,
“Samuel! Samuel!”

At first, he mistakes it for the voice of his master Eli and goes to him, but after it happens for the third time Eli perceives that it is God doing the calling and encourages Samuel to respond,

“Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening”.

Then, in our Gospel reading, we have Jesus calling Philip,

“Follow me”.

And then Philip calling Nathanael, saying to him,

“We have found him about whom Moses and the prophets wrote... Come and see”.

So, we have two stories of call.

And one of the things these stories tell us in the first instance is that *we have a God who calls us!*

And that is perhaps a more profound truth than we realise.

Because being *called* is about being *known*.

In the book of the prophet Isaiah we hear God speaking to the people of Israel, saying,

“I have called you by name, you are mine”.

“I have called you by name, you are mine...”

“Samuel! Samuel!” says God to that boy in the night.

God knows his name.

“Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!”, says Jesus to Nathanael.

Jesus knows who Nathanael is,

knows what kind of man he is.

We are known to God,

known by God,

known intimately and personally;

known in all our strengths and weaknesses;
known in all our insecurities and anxieties;
known in all our doubts and fears,
known in all our cynicism and scepticism (as the case may have been for
Nathanael and many of us).

We are known by God and we are *called* by God,
called to be a part of God's purpose in the world.
And perhaps, actually, just called to *be*,
to be known and to know we are known,
and to trust that in that being known we are loved utterly and completely.

And that's the thing.

We are not called *despite* our insecurities and anxieties.
We are not called *despite* our doubts and fears.
No, we are called *in the midst* of our insecurities and anxieties,
in the midst of our doubts and fears
and perhaps even *because* of them, because we are known and loved.

And in that love our doubts and fears, our anxieties and insecurities can be places of
grace,
places *for* grace,
places where we can discover that that we are not alone,
that we do not stand or fall on our own,
that it is not all up to us.

Those doubts and fears and anxieties and insecurities are places instead where we can
find out that we are loved utterly and completely by the God in whose image we are
made.

In whose image we are all made.

Being called and loved and known all go together.
And all of us are called, loved and known.

I said before that we are called to be a part of God's purpose in the world.
And perhaps, actually, called just to *be*.
And I want to say a little bit more about that.

Because I think that maybe our greater calling, our greatest calling, even, is not ultimately to some work or occupation, although that is clearly part of our experience of God's call.

I think our greatest calling is actually to that awareness that we are known and loved by God.

Because I think it is that awareness, that knowledge, that has the power to both *hold* us and *transform* us.

And when I say "hold" us, what I am referring to is that experience of being surrounded and upheld,

that experience of calm in the midst of trouble,
of peace in the midst of fear,
of presence in the midst of chaos or isolation.

And when we are so *held* so we are also *transformed*.

We are *transformed* because in our awareness of God's presence and God's peace we are also able to respond differently to those circumstances that previously may have felt so overwhelming, so oppressive or confining.

Those circumstances themselves may not actually change but our capacity to respond, to live and to love, in the midst of those circumstances is what changes:

our hearts and minds are opened;
our world is enlarged;
our capacity to experience *grace*, and to respond in kind is also enlarged.

We find ourselves, in the words of the Psalmist,

"brought out into a broad place", "a spacious place" (Psalms 31:8; 66:12),
a place where there is room to move, and a freedom to respond to the world around us in ways that are not dominated or defined by fear or antipathy or distrust.

And one of the things we might come to realise from all of this awareness of being known and loved is that our calling as human beings who are known and loved is not a one-time thing.

Nor is it a single path stretching out before us leading us to become a butcher or a baker or a candlestick maker or an anthropologist or a teacher or a poet, as if that one thing is what we are destined to be.

Although it may be that in the doing or being of those things we may find ourselves expressing and experiencing something of what God is calling us toward.

But our calling is actually a moment-by-moment thing,

a moment-by-moment invitation to let God's love hold us, shape us, comfort us, strengthen us, call us, transform us, propel us, even, out and into the world.

And one of the things we might also notice is that in responding to this moment-by-moment invitation and movement, each moment and each movement has the capacity to lead us deeper into an awareness of God, of ourselves, and of our place in the world.

When Nathaniel expresses his wonder that Jesus recognized him sitting under the fig tree, Jesus asserts that following the path of Christ will lead to greater wonder and adventures.

“You will see heaven opened and the angels ascending and descending upon the son of man.”

These words are reminiscent of Jacob's mystical experience of a ladder of angels, and in that they are also an invitation to embrace the wonders of life.

In this sense, we are always standing, sleeping, praying, and eating on holy ground, even if we may not always be aware of that.

We are always, each one of us known and loved, being called into a fuller experience of God and of ourselves, lover and beloved.

So this is what it means to be loved and known and called:

to have a God who in each moment is loving us into life,
who in each moment is putting before us possibilities for newness,
who in each moment is opening up a way before us where there was none before,
who in each moment is leading us out of the confines of fear and distrust into a “broad and spacious place” where we can again and again experience the wonder of God's grace.