

This morning we hear two stories that are known as “Call Stories.” Since I was a child, I have loved the story of Samuel – how God called his name, but the child Samuel did not know who it was. He thought it was the elderly priest who had charge over him and so he quickly went to Eli but Eli said he had not called him. So, Samuel went back to bed.

Another time in the night, the child heard his name being called again – “*Samuel. Samuel.*” Again, he went to Eli and asked what he wanted. But Eli, once more told Samuel he did not call him.

When it happened a third time, old Eli began to realize the Lord was calling Samuel. He told Samuel if he heard the voice calling again to say, “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.”

And he did. And the Lord raised Samuel up to be a great prophet.

And then we come to John and we see Jesus in Galilee. He has just been baptized by John the Baptist and John proclaims to his own disciples that Jesus is the Lamb of God. And two of his disciples turn and follow Jesus. They wanted to know where Jesus was staying and Jesus gave that invitation, “Come and see.”

One of those men was Andrew, who went to get his brother Simon Peter, telling him he had found the Messiah. And Jesus named Peter Cephas, which means Rock. Later Jesus would say to Peter, you are Rock and on this Rock I will build my church. And Peter was very instrumental in the beginnings of the Christian Church.

The next day Jesus went to Philip and invited him to follow and Philip went to Nathaniel to ask him to come too. Even Nathaniel who was skeptical. “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” he asked.

Philip didn’t get defensive or argumentative. He just said, “Come and see.”

Come and see. Three little words that made a huge difference for all those disciples who stepped out in faith and followed Jesus. And they were Jesus’ friends and helpmates during his ministry and long after he died. They worked to further Jesus ministry and to build the Christian Church. And we, thousands of years later still are a part of that church and that ministry.

Come and see. Three little words. They are not defensive, coercive or argumentative. They are simply inviting.

So I want to ask you today a couple of questions. First: what is it about this church that you especially like; that draws you here week after week? We all know that among Christians (not to mention other religions) there are many different denominations with varying beliefs; there is a

wide variety of worship styles and music. There are big churches and little ones. Churches with many programs and some with only a few.

Why do you come to Holly Presbyterian Church? What do you like best about this place?

The second question is: would you invite someone you know to come and see this thing about your church that you like so much? Would you share your enthusiasm with someone else? Invite them to come see for themselves?

They say that the number one reason people come to a church for the first time isn't because of the size of the church, or the beautiful building or even the awesome, brilliant preaching they've heard people talk about.

It's because someone invited them. Most people come to church because someone invited them to come.

If you go to a really good movie that you just loved, you tell people about it, don't you? "You've just got to see that movie! It is so good." You might say.

Just last week, I told two people here at church about a book I was reading. "I really want you to read this book. I think it's one you would enjoy a lot." I said. And they wrote down the title and author. Because I told them about it.

I'm sure some of you do tell others about your church. Or you have. And not everyone is going to come. But someone will. Eventually. I think the best way we are going to grow the church today is by telling others why we come and inviting them to come and see for themselves.

There are many ways that we are called. Some of us are called to teach; some to sing in the choir. Some of us are called to be visitors of people who are sick or homebound. Some are called to work with children and youth. Others are called to prepare food, or to knit and make things like prayer shawls.

The call to follow Jesus and to serve him is for all who believe. Even for those who may be skeptical at first, like Nathaniel. Pastors have a call to serve as ministers. Elders and Deacons are called by God to serve as leaders, along with the pastor.

If you think about it, we have lots of stories in the Bible about people who were called by God. Abraham was called to leave his country and friends and to head out with his family and livestock to an unknown place where God would lead him.

Noah was called by God to build an ark and to gather two of every animal and all his family. If he hadn't answered that call, it might have all been over a long time ago.

Moses was called to lead the Israelites out of slavery into the Promised Land. Jonah was called to preach to the Ninevites – that great sinful city.

Of course, we know that there was sometimes much resistance by those whom God had called. Look at Jonah. He ran the other way and ended up in the belly of a whale.

The thing is, you can run, but you really can't hide. God keeps calling. Max Lucado had a book he titled "The Hound of Heaven." God keeps after you and won't let you go too far. You can say no for a while but the Holy Spirit just doesn't give up.

When I was a girl, just ten years old, I felt God was calling me to be a missionary someday. I told my mother who was skeptical. I could tell by the look on her face. Then, when I was 17 – a senior in High School who thought sure I was in love and had my life planned out – I went to a girls missionary conference with the Baptist Convention and there, once again, I had a very strong pull to go to the missionary pastor who had preached and to surrender my life to missions.

The problem was – at that time – I did not want God to interfere with my plans for love and life. I was sure that I would be in for a life in Africa or someplace like that and I would not get to marry my love and – well. I wasn't ready. And as hard as it was not to go to the altar, I held my ground, crying my eyes out.

Later, I talked to that preacher and he said, "If God is calling you to ministry, God will not give up on it. He will keep calling you."

Later that summer, the boy I was sure I would marry after college broke up with me. Unfortunately, I was so devastated that I did not give a thought to missions at the time. I went through a period of real grief and loss for a while. But, obviously, God did not give up because here I am.

You see, following Jesus – serving God – that call is not your initiative. It is God's initiative. Jesus invites. There is no coercion. It's okay to be skeptical. It might take some time to say yes. But God doesn't give up on you – Just come and see. See for yourselves what God can do. See what following Jesus can mean in your life.

This morning we have a very special thing to do in the life of the church. We will ordain two new elders who have heard the call and have said yes. They will be ordained, which means to be set aside for this special service – leading this congregation in ministry. You have elected them for this office. We will ordain Cathie Killewald and Donna DeNise. One they are ordained, they will forever be ordained in the Presbyterian Church, USA.

When we ordain elders they are elders for life and no matter where they go, as long as they are in the Presbyterian Church USA, they are ordained to serve and never need to be ordained again.

Then we will install those two elders and two others (Jim Lyles and Jan Bradshaw) to active service on the Session – the council of elders you elected to serve in leadership roles. All of these elders have been called by God. They have answered saying yes.

But they cannot do the work without all of you supporting them and helping them. Each one is a team leader – leading us in various aspects of the ministry of the church. If we did not have those ministries, we really would not be a church, would we?

So, when they ask you to serve on a team, you too are being called. The invitation might come from their mouths but God is working through others to call you to serve. They cannot do the work of the church without all of you who are equipped with spiritual gifts for the ministry of the church.

Just like Andrew went to get Peter; Philip went to get Nathaniel – it is a ministry of calling others to join; to come and see what we are doing. Come and see what God is doing. Come and see.

Won't you consider passing the invitation on; telling others why you love this church and inviting them to come and see? Would you consider going to the team leader and saying, I want to serve. How can I help? Would you consider answering the call by saying yes?

This is the second Sunday in Epiphany. It is the season when we are observing how we see Jesus in new ways. The wise men saw him and it was revealed to them that he was the Son of God.

Andrew saw Jesus and went to tell Peter – Come and see Jesus. I have found the Messiah. He saw and knew who Jesus was.

May we too – all through this year – see Jesus in new light. And may we answer that call over and over. The call to come and see.

Let us pray:

Come, Holy Spirit, that we may see and taste the grace of God afresh.

Come, Holy Spirit, that we might share the grace of God with others.

Come, Holy Spirit, that we might bear witness with our whole lives to the grace of God made manifest and available to us in Jesus. Amen.

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