

A Sermon Preached by The Rev. James C. Ransom

Lord, you have searched me out and known me;
you know my sitting down and my rising up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
Lord, speak to me, for your servant is listening.

Amen.

Discipleship — hearing God's call and responding to it — that is what you and I are asked by God's Spirit in Holy Scripture to talk about today.

The call of the boy Samuel to be a priest of the Temple is a touching story as the old priest, Eli, whose ministry is spent and over, gives his wisdom to the young Samuel so that he can hear and respond to God's call. For our purposes today, the key phrase in this story is this: "The word of the Lord was rare in those days." Many people assume that if there is a God at all, God is far away, hard to hear, and makes few, if any, demands. The word of the Lord is so rare it is not worth listening for it. It is nothing less than astonishing that God should call to Samuel. It would be even more astonishing if God called you or me.

From the time of Jesus' baptism, when he came into Galilee proclaiming the Gospel, Jesus started to call people to be his disciples, and they followed him. We are all well aware that Jesus called the twelve, but the story we read today in John's Gospel is about Nathaniel. It was the disciple Philip who found Nathaniel and asked him to "come and see" Jesus. Reluctantly, like Samuel struggling to listen, Nathaniel's encounter with Jesus turned him from skeptic to follower. Jesus likens him to the deceitful cheat, Jacob, who finds a new relationship with God while wrestling with an angel. Like Jacob, Jesus says, "you will see the heavens opened, and the angles of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

The die is cast. Jesus called disciples, who called disciples, who called disciples, until today there are two billion disciples of Jesus on the earth, just about equal to the number of all Christians that ever lived prior to today. You are one of these disciples, and God has called you, like Samuel and Nathaniel, to be a disciple here at Trinity Church.

So, what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ here at Trinity Church?

First, it means making an adult profession of faith and committing yourself to Jesus before the church, just like Nathaniel did when he said to Jesus, "You are the Son of God." Every disciple at Trinity has made, or should make, a profession of faith before the bishop and be welcomed and blessed by the bishop as a disciple. We call this confirmation or reception, and like with Nathaniel, it is the first step to discipleship: the decision to follow Jesus as your Lord.

Second, discipleship means throwing in your lot with Jesus and the other disciples. It means becoming a responsible member of Trinity Church. A responsible disciple worships God every Sunday in the gathering of the faithful as the Body of Christ. This ongoing witness to Christ provides the milieu in which Christ speaks God's Word to the world in the proclamation of the Gospel; and breaks the Bread among us through which he is known to us.

To throw your lot in with the other disciples means more than just showing up for worship. It means two other things. The disciples of Jesus shared their resources in a common purse that provided for the life and ministry of the community of faith. We do the same. Every disciple of Trinity Church should, no needs to, make a pledge for 2009. Your pledge to Trinity is your promise to support the common life of this church with a fair and proportional share of your income.

Now to that part of discipleship that I want to lift up today as being particularly important. Discipleship means that you are called to active ministry within the church and beyond. Active ministry means participating in the learning life of Trinity Church — what we call Christian formation. Disciples intentionally and eagerly learn about their faith, growing more deeply into Christ through prayer and reflection and learning with other disciples. Disciples join in sharing time and talent to serve the needs of the church for leadership. Every member of Trinity should serve on a Task Group, help with worship, lead a program, teach in Sunday School. Trinity needs your time and talent as much and more than it requires your money. Lastly, Trinity needs your service — an active commitment to show Christ's love by serving the elderly, the young, and the poor. Jesus washed the feet of his disciples to show us how to serve as his disciples in the world.

It is the call of Jesus to be his disciple that, with Samuel and Nathaniel, we hear today. Jesus is calling you to discover the joy of fully engaging that call as a member of Trinity Church. The Lord has searched you out and knows you. And as his disciple, you will see the heavens opened, and angels ascending and descending on the children of Jesus, as the kingdom of God is opened to you when you walk in love as Christ loved us in humble service to God.