

Focus on Community

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

When I read the scripture passages for today the first thing that came to mind was individuality. We can view all of these texts from our own perspective. We might think of times when we were called by God to do something. I think it's easy to go down the path of looking at our individual self, especially since our culture influences us day in and day out to think of ourselves.

However, I think if we only view today's readings in light of individuals and not as a community, we may miss the heart of what these passages are trying to tell us.

In our first reading we have the call of Samuel. The text begins somewhat hopeless when we hear the words "The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread." We can picture an uncertainty within Israel. No visions- Eli's sight was dim. In this uncertain time God calls Samuel. Once Eli tells Samuel that it is God calling him, Samuel is a willing servant of God. The next morning Samuel opens the doors – giving Israel hope once again.

We can view this text as individual call of Samuel but as I mentioned earlier all of our texts point to life in the community. God called Samuel for the entire community of Israel. He continued to speak to Samuel at Shiloh for the benefit of his people, not just Samuel.

Stephen Cook comments on this passage, "It speaks of God's work of ending and beginning on behalf of God's entire people."

Samuel isn't called for his own private benefit, but for the benefit of Israel moving forward out of this time of uncertainty and darkness.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians also supports the idea of community. In fact, most of the Corinthian correspondence is written against individualism. The Corinthians wanted to be the Spiritual elite. It seemed that they all wanted to be on top and say the way that they believed things and lived their lives was the correct way.

In our reading for today – Paul deflates this kind of thinking. Paul challenges the Corinthians to focus on their collective vocation. Our bodies are members of Christ. What one person does, affects the whole.

In our gospel text we hear three simple words, come and see. Philip tells Nathanael about Jesus. Nathanael is skeptical because Jesus comes from Nazareth. Philip's simple words of come and see prompted Nathanael to meet Jesus where he comes to believe that Jesus is the Messiah – the one about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote.

As I thought and prayed about these texts I couldn't help but think of the community here at Saint Nicholas.

Last week we received a letter from Pastor Greg and Ann Wolfgang, our council president describing the situation to obtain our use and occupancy permit for the North Wing. There is

anxiety and excitement in this community. A long time dream of this congregation is becoming a reality and yet it isn't easy and there is uncertainty in it. And it can be scary.

That being said – as a community I imagine there are many different opinions about things. But as Paul reminded the Corinthians – he too reminds us that we need to come together in community and realize our collective vocation – to do the work of God in the world.

Through our current ministries and anticipated ministries we hope to begin upon the completion of the North Wing we come together to do God's work. Sometimes that means moving forward even though we may not understand where or why God is leading us in a certain direction. Or it means that we need to view our current standing and work with what we have instead of looking in the rear view mirror at what might have been. Our goal is to work together as a community and do what God asks of us, learning to live with our similarities and differences.

As Philip invited Nathanael to come and see we too are called to do the same. Invite friends to come and see this community of faith. Encourage others to come and be inspired by Jesus as Nathanael was.

As we move forward we should try to look beyond ourselves to the community- the body of Christ. We can do this together.

In the beginning of this sermon I said all of today's readings could point to community. I conveniently left our talking about the Psalm until now.

As a community God has searched us and knows us. God is with us in this community. God abides with us at all times – in times of uncertainty, in times of joy, and in times of sorrow.

God knows our collective thoughts and walks with us in our journey together.

We are part of the body of Christ – a community gathered together for the work of God in this world.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding be in your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.