

The Gospel today is about being called by Jesus and how some men responded. It's often pointed out that Jesus was drawn to ask ordinary unknown men to follow him. Sometimes in spite of reservations their openness to whatever that meant, however they could help, sets God's ongoing plan into motion. A plan to have a close relationship with us in order to show us a truer path of Love in the world. Every day we are asked if we will follow Jesus to continue changing the world.

In movies and literature ordinary people bravely take on important challenges. They seem all-in; in hindsight their answer to the follow me invitation is a Big Yes. These archetypal heroes are compelled by a persistent outer or inner voice to right a wrong or speak truth to power. The Iowa farmer in *Field of Dreams* heeds a mysterious voice blowing through his cornfield, "If you build it, he will come." Ethan Hunt in the *Mission Impossible* movies responds to "Your mission, if you choose to accept it." Frodo of *Lord of the Rings*, Katniss in *The Hunger Games*, and Harry Potter all challenge and ultimately vanquish evil.

Scripture tells us of people living ordinary lives who also suddenly receive a call from God: Moses near that burning bush; Mary staring at the angel; Paul groveling blindly on the dirt road; Jesus hearing God's voice at his baptism and while wrestling with demons in the wilderness. Some even hear the call at a young age: Samuel is about 11 when God whispers to him; a young teenager, David, becomes aware of God's call when an older Samuel surprisingly anoints him king. Jesus calls Andrew and Philip who then invite Peter and Nathanael to "come and see."

To all of these people God does the calling. They don't seize the opportunity first. Jesus showed that he knew the pure nature of Nathanael's heart and his good motives. Jesus invited the disciples to join him; they didn't initiate the job interview. I have to remember constantly that now, today, Jan. 17, God is still calling me and you. Jesus promised Nathanael and us today that we "will see greater things than these."

So, God invites us into a personal relationship. But, then what? Speaking for myself, and because our human brains tend to judge ourselves and each other, I am intimidated by the Big Yeses of those on the Hero's Journey.. Those heroes said yes...to planning the baseball diamond, accepting the mission, to freeing slaves from the Egyptians, to preaching to the Gentiles, to willingly birth Jesus, and to willingly die to connect us personally with God...forever. To be a Christian is to respond in faith. We do have to answer yes though. Not a yes....but..... Not a perhaps. Not an ok, after I finish....An unequivocal definite Yes.

We've heard the call. We've responded Yes. Now what? The call is for a purpose, so we have to act. We can't just sit in a cozy corner contemplating our special status that God loves us personally. We have to build the field, finish the mission, free the slaves, preach even from prison, give birth & have patience raising the child. Samuel learned from his mentor Eli. Andrew, Peter, Philip, Nathanael and the other disciples committed to studying and learning from Jesus. They prayed with him. They walked hundreds of miles with him watching his compassionate care of others. The pattern of hearing God's call, responding and then acting to spread God's truth of love & compassion in the world is clear.

How might we see this pattern playing out in our world today? Those who answer God's call in 2021 must be ready with a huge response, right? World pandemic, quarantining, major political upheaval, citizens armed with weapons and hateful rhetoric clashing with fellow citizens, the specter of institutional racism.

Many have suggested we are experiencing apocalyptic times as described in the book of Revelation. However, as Fr. Richard Rohr explains, the word apocalypse means "unveiling." God is possibly unveiling a new path. We, like Mary, may be going through scary birth pangs to reveal a new normal of hope and truth. In his time in a somewhat unjust society occupied by Rome Jesus and his disciples introduced a new way to act with love, compassion and mercy. Perhaps we're being told to keep awake, to see a new revelation of the truth we already know that God is Love. During this time of unveiling we can trust and have faith that God will show us new ways to act.

But when I “keep awake” and look at the world around me fear often overshadows my faith. My faith says God calls every person to follow Jesus’s example; my fear says “Who am I against such major catastrophes? Perhaps a more connected, more faithful, more well known politician or modern day prophet will answer the Big Call, to respond with the Big Yes! and to lead the righteous action.”

Scripture tells us though that God more often calls that ordinary, unassuming person. He is calling us into relationship, to come and see. It’s a daily call, not only once in a lifetime. Not just to talk the talk, but literally to walk the walk...the Way of Love as Bishop Curry encourages.

Through pandemic and political unrest God says “Follow me.” I may not always be able to step up in trust and faith but God can work with my tentative, Little Yes, if I am willing. Like Nathanael, my intention and pure motives are enough. Samuel answered, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” Nathanael began as a doubter, but then said “Rabbi, you are the Son of God!” Like the acrobat in the circus who lets go of the high swinging trapeze, confident her partner will catch her, we can willingly surrender to follow Jesus’s Way. Trusting in God’s promise to us, we let go of ourselves into Jesus’s hands. Even our whispered Little Yeses compel action. We open ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Shake off fear; step out in faith. Risk to follow Christ’s Way of Love.

Yes, there are horrendous events happening in the world around us. We can sit paralyzed, giving up, waiting for others to fix things. Or, as Christians, we can answer the call God sends daily for us to counter the hate, sickness and conflicts with love, compassion and merciful justice. Not everyone will be the heroic disciple, answering the Big Call. Unsung heroes are no less loved by God. Those who commit to being Christ’s eyes, ears, hands and feet in our world are neighbors, friends, coworkers, strangers, family, even people we may not like very much. We can answer the call, not with big splashy actions, but perhaps by unseen quiet ones. We may never know the impact of our actions; God knows, that’s what’s important.

Examples of Jesus’s Way of Love spread by those who have willingly answered God’s call are all around us if we have eyes of the heart to see. Reporters write about young children starting food drives and sending cards to nursing homes. Behind the scenes these children’s parents are the unsung heroes helping to spread compassion and love. Another clip featured a man in his garage making simple desks for quarantining students who had no workplace in their homes while attending virtual school. The idea went viral and soon he was sending patterns for the desks all over the country. And, you know, I can’t remember his name, but God does and that’s what’s important. There are multiple websites catering to spreading kindness. In fact the phrase, Be kind, is trending now. One list has 75 Sparks of Kindness suggestions like leaving quarters at the laundromat, tying scarves on posts for the homeless, and just smiling more. I particularly like #27 - Thank you note and treat to priest. :-)

To answer a call doesn’t mean we commit to earthshaking tasks like building a baseball field, winning the Hunger Games, vanquishing Voldemort or stopping the spread of the Covid virus. To answer God’s call we can commit to following the example of Jesus by small acts of love too. We commit to changing the world one small act at a time with love, not hate, merciful justice, not stringent laws, inclusiveness not division.

The divine spark within us shines God’s Love in the darkness. There are small lights of hope and kindness everywhere. Our ordinary lives can have extraordinary significance when we understand that love is the hero.

My daily prayer now?: I am willing to take this little light of mine, the divine spark within me, on a walk of faith. I am willing to walk as a child of the light...of the way of love. Yes, I am willing to follow. Lord, what will you have me do today?

