

Come and see!

When I first glimpsed the readings for this Sunday, I had a sneaking suspicion these passages were familiar... and I was a little uneasy about the topic.

My suspicions were confirmed once I'd read them. I think they can be summed up with the phrase, "God's call". God's call is a loaded phrase, right? What does it even mean? "God's call" can mean lots of different things to different people. Is it about a specific vocation or purpose, or is it about lifelong discipleship? How do you talk about "God's call" when you feel like you're going through a tunnel and the heavenly signal is breaking up? And how do I sum this all up in 10 minutes?

The verse that stood out to me in today's gospel was a call – when Phillip says to Nathaniel, "Come and see." I want to talk about three "calls" this morning. The first is God's call to us; the second is our call to God, and the third is our call to others.

The first call starts with a story. About four years ago I came to a dead end. I had pursued what I thought was God's purpose for my life for several years, only to have that particular journey come to an abrupt halt. All my hopes and dreams had rested on this vocation working out, and so with nowhere else to go, I returned home to my parents, defeated and angry and confused, stuck in a waitressing job where I was lucky to get one shift a week.

I wrote in my journal at the time, "I'm bored. What am I supposed to do with all this free time, and no friends? I'm stuck. What do I do? Why is God so quiet? Why is everything crumbling around me? What is going on?" These questions may feel familiar to you in the midst of another lockdown.

But that's when God called to me and said, "Come and see Me. Come and see My love for you. I don't need what you can do. I just want you. And you are you with or without a ministry, with or without a purpose, with or without a plan." God's primary call to us, before anything else, is a call to be *loved*.

Shortly before our gospel reading takes place, we see Jesus invite two disciples to "come and see". He draws them, and us, into Himself by inviting us to follow where He leads. God doesn't lecture or scold or hide. He patiently holds out His hand and says, "Come and see and experience My love for yourself."

Those few months where I felt like I was waiting for my life to begin, was a place where I finally stopped long enough to hear God's voice saying, "I love you." That experience laid a whole new foundation in my life. And perhaps this latest lockdown is another foundation-laying moment in our lives.

The second call takes place *after* today's gospel passage, way, way down the line in John 11. One of Jesus' closest and dearest friends, Lazarus, has died, and Jesus has gone to visit Lazarus' sisters and mourn with them. We read that Jesus "was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'Where have you laid Lazarus?' They said to Him, 'Lord, come and see.'"

A relationship with God is a two-way street. God invites us into Himself, but He also hears us when we ask Him to be where we are. The Lord Jesus is not immune to pain, or grief, or suffering. C.S Lewis illustrates this so well in *The Magician's Nephew*. Digory's mum is dying, and he is desperate to save her, and so he blurts out to the great Lion Aslan, "'But please, please – won't you – can't you give me something that will cure Mother?'" Up till then he had been looking at the Lion's great feet and the huge claws on them; now, in his

despair, he looked up at its face. What he saw surprised him... for the tawny face was bent down near his own and great shining tears stood in the Lion's eyes. They were such big, bright tears compared with Digory's own that for a moment he felt as if the Lion must really be sorrier about his mother than he was himself. 'My son, my son,' said Aslan, 'I know.'"

Don't be afraid to invite God into your mess. Don't be afraid to invite Him into the dark scary places where you feel all alone. Don't be afraid to gesture to the whole world and say, "Lord, come and see." He is not afraid to walk those paths with you. He is *El Roi* – the God who sees. This world desperately needs the touch of our loving, compassionate and powerful God.

The third call leads us, at last, to today's reading. Nathaniel is baffled and bemused by his friend's rather stunning and out-of-the-blue announcement that he's found the Messiah prophesied about in the Old Testament – and that He's from the tiny village of Nazareth just down the road of all places! The extraordinary emerges from the ordinary.

But rather than try to describe Jesus or persuade Nathaniel that He's worth the hype, Phillip simply says, "Come and see." As someone who's struggled with lockdown and a sense of purposelessness, this passage leads me to conclude that if you want to boil down your purpose in life to the very basics, it is an invitation. An invitation to everyone we meet to come and see the God who made the universe, the God who knows you intimately and loves you. We all have different gifts and skills and opportunities to invite others to "come and see". That's mostly what I'm doing right now – I'm inviting you all to come and see. That's what we do when we gather on a Sunday morning – we're responding to that invitation to come and see. We can offer that invitation in big, grand ways, but it is probably better seen and received in small ways. Check in on a family member, collect shopping for a neighbour, send a funny YouTube video to a friend.

Every day, God is inviting us to "come and see". The days ahead may feel repetitive and long and difficult, but that doesn't mean God hasn't got anything to say, or that His Holy Spirit isn't powerfully at work in us or around us. First and foremost, we are invited to be loved by God as we are, not for what we can do. Secondly, God wants us to invite Him into our lives, in our trials and troubles for sure, but in our moments of joy and happiness too! And finally, we are God's own invitation to draw others into His love. God is calling you today. Go and see what He has for you, and rejoice.