

## Here I am, Lord    January 14<sup>th</sup> 2018    Epiphany 2

*O God, help us to listen to your word with understanding, to receive it with faith and to obey it with courage.    Amen*

We all have a variety of names and titles by which we are known to different groups of people. Many of us are known by, and respond to, the name we were given at our baptism. Some of us, like me, prefer an abbreviated form of that name. In fact, the only people who call me by my full given name are my brother, and the nurse at the medical centre. To most people, therefore, I am Gill. That is how I introduce myself, and that is how I wish to be known.

It is not always appropriate, though, to use that name. My grand-daughters call me Granny Gill, and look forward to being old enough to be like their cousins, and drop the Granny bit. When I am in school the boys call me 'Miss', probably because they do not know my name, but more likely because that is how they address all females in school . A touch demeaning, and inaccurate, as I haven't been a 'miss' since 1971.

What we are called is important to us. We feel a bit slighted if someone confuses us with someone else and calls us by their name, rather than ours. We also have different names for different circumstances. As I said, my granddaughters call me Granny Gill. I wouldn't expect any of you to call me that. When they were small, my children called me Mummy. They stopped that when they were in their early teens, as it no longer seemed appropriate, and now call me Gill, like everyone else.

Mind you, it can be confusing if the name you prefer to be known by is not the first of your given names. This might even apply to some of you here. I can remember visiting an old friend in hospital several years ago. We all knew him as Geoff, that was how he introduced himself, and that – as far as everyone was concerned – was what he was called. Those of us who visited him in hospital therefore, were mightily entertained by the notice above his bed. Alongside the one which said 'Nil by mouth' was what purported to be his name, only it said '**Roland Mendham**', and he was having great difficulty in getting it changed.

Just as we can have more than one name, the word call can have more than one meaning. According to my dictionary, when used as a verb, the word can mean to **name** – which is what I have just been talking about, or to **summon or request to be present**.

In today's readings we heard how three different men were summoned, or requested to be present, and how they reacted .

## Firstly **Samuel**

We are told that Samuel was only a child, and that he was lying down in the temple near the ark, and that it must have been in the very early morning, as the lamp was still alight. He heard a voice calling him, and assumed it was Eli, who was nearly blind, and who therefore relied on Samuel to guide him around. This happened three times, until Eli realised that it must be God who was calling the boy, and so told him how he should react. When Samuel replies to God's call with the words: "Speak, for your servant is listening", God gives him a message of judgement for the house of Eli. Samuel delivers this message, and thereafter is known as a trustworthy prophet of the Lord., someone who will interpret what God is telling his people and will relate this, in no uncertain terms, to them.

Samuel is eventually appointed judge and religious leader in Eli's place. If you want all the details of the activities of Samuel, Saul and David, then read the two books named after Samuel.

## Then we had **Philip and Nathanael,**

Jesus found Philip and said to him: 'Follow me'. We don't know what Philip said back. Whether he said 'Who, me?', or 'You must be joking', or 'I've got better things to do', we don't know. It would seem that it wasn't any of those, but a simple 'OK', because the next thing we are told is that Philip went and found his friend Nathanael. Nathanael was a bit of an intellectual, a thinker, who was wont to sit and meditate under a fig tree, where he had been seen by Jesus.

Nathanael's response was less than enthusiastic, because when he hears that it is Jesus, son of Joseph, the carpenter from Nazareth, he replies: 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip encourages him to come and see for himself. Nathanael had not met Jesus before, but Jesus seems to know him, in the way he greets him: 'Here is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit'. Nathanael not surprisingly wants to know how Jesus knows him, to which Jesus replies: 'I saw you under the fig tree, before Philip called you'.

Some writers think that this is a reference to the prophet Micah, 'Each shall sit under his vine or his fig tree and none shall make them afraid'. It is likely that Nathanael recognises this Messianic reference, and so exclaims: 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel!'

God called Samuel, who eventually replied that he was listening.

Jesus called Philip, who went and found a friend.

Jesus called Nathanael through Philip, and Nathanael recognised Jesus as the Son of God, the King of Israel.

When we sing our next hymn, we will sing the words of God asking three things –  
Who will bear his light to brighten people's darkness?  
Who will speak his word to those who have turned away?  
Who will be sent in his name?

To which we reply:

Here I am, Lord, Is it I, Lord?

I have heard you calling in the night.

I will go, Lord, if you lead me.

I will hold your people in my heart

God is telling us that there are things to be done in his name, and our response must be 'Here I am Lord, I will do these things **if you lead me**. I cannot do them on my own, but I will do what I can, if you lead me and show me what it is you want me to do.

Twenty nine years ago, I was given a blue scarf, and a copy of the New Testament & Psalms, signed by Bishop Mark, to signify my admission as a Reader in the Church.

I became a Reader because I responded to God's call to do things in his name, and with his help I hope that I am doing that.

We are not all called to be Readers. We are blessed in this parish to have a whole team of people who fulfil a range of tasks which they believe they have been called to do – or may just have been asked and couldn't think why not. Every week we are enjoined to 'Go in peace to love and serve the Lord'. God has called, or is calling, all of us to discover what it is we can do for him. It might be to polish the silver for celebrating the Eucharist. It might be to produce music for our worship. It might be to make tea and coffee for our fellowship together. It might be to visit the sick or the housebound, or to hold in prayer those who have asked for spiritual support. It might even be to become a member of the ordained ministry, as David has done, and as Simon is preparing to do.

We all have different gifts to offer to God, and we must keep our hearts and minds open to his call.

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