

## *Call Waiting*

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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by Rev. Dave Le Grand

My parents will at some point be seeing this message, so I had better be careful about what I say. They have had the "Call Waiting" feature on their phone for a few years, now. It is a great function, allowing for the possibility of multi tasking, that is, talking to one person, but hearing a beep indicating that there is someone calling you on another line. Call waiting allows me to ask the person, politely, if I might answer the other call, and quickly come back to the first one.

I know... I know... it is annoying to be left on hold. It is questionable phone etiquette, especially in the minds of those who remember the days of dial phones and when you only talked to one person at a time.

So when I call my parents, sometimes I will let it ring for awhile. I know that they hear the call waiting, but they ignore the call waiting beep – that is, me – in order to focus on their present call. Spiritually, psychologically that is very healthy. I know that. But, it annoys me just a little bit that they have call waiting yet quite often they choose not to use it. The minister in me, though, says, "Way to go, Mrs. & Mr. LeGrand, be present and attentive!"

Ok, so I've been thinking about the Bible stories where people accepting the call of God. In the Gospels specifically, Jesus, invites them to follow. I would imagine him very excited with some like Philip who are open in heart and mind to following – "Come Philip!"

But Nathanael, well, he is a skeptic. Do you know any skeptics? I do. Like a modern person with the spiritual "call waiting" feature on our heart – we hear the beep, but we choose not to use it. God, it seems, at least according to Gospel storyteller John, is both persistent and creative. God works around walls.

Jesus finds Philip, then, Philip finds Nathanael. Aren't the best evangelists often the more recent converts? Philip doesn't preach, or try to prove; sometimes overzealous new evangelists take that too far. Philip, though, just says, "Come and see."<sup>1</sup>

Isn't it true that a most persuasive person is a first hand witness? Sincere, believable, authentic – God chose well with Philip. So, Philip invites his friend to come see this Son of God, Jesus. Nathanael goes, but I don't think he has left his skepticism behind. Right away, it seems that Jesus likes him. He speaks his mind. No deceit in Nathanael. No, he is quite open about his doubt. Then there is that strange moment – Jesus shares with Nathanael that he saw him under the fig tree awhile back.

For some reason, mysteriously, Nathanael makes a full spiritual course correction, "Teacher, you are the Son of God! ...the King of Israel!"<sup>2</sup> I think that many of us are like

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<sup>1</sup> Elton W. Brown, "Pastoral Perspective." *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*. Year B, Volume 1: Advent through Transfiguration.

<sup>2</sup> John chapter 1, verse 49

Nathanael – we want to believe but there are so many scoundrels and swindlers in our world. We just need a reason to believe, and God needs to win us over.

Nathanael learns, as so many people of Jesus' time do, not to assume where God's holiness will arise and shine, even in a nowhere village like Nazareth. Epiphany moments where holiness is revealed happen when we least expect them. Jesus makes an allusion at the end of this passage, a declaration that Nathanael and others will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.<sup>3</sup>

Does that image seem familiar? In the Hebrew Scriptures, remember that Jesus is a Jew, he would have known these stories and dreamed them. Jacob was an ambitious scoundrel who robbed twin brother Esau of his birthright and the privileges that came with being the eldest. Jacob was quite a character – swindling through life. His history catches up with him one dark night in his soul, when Jacob dreams of a ladder between heaven and earth, angels ascending and descending. Jacob changed his ways. God time and again calls interesting characters, finds them even if they don't want to be found – Nathanael being one. God takes a creative route to find Nathanael's guarded heart.

So, I have been thinking about the Bible stories, God calling people. Philip – perhaps he is like the modern person, who hears the metaphorical spiritual call waiting beep, then politely asks if he can answer that call and come back. Nathanael, I suspect, is more like many of us, letting it beep.

In the mid 1990's Joan Osborne sang, "One of Us". It speaks to me about God finding us, even if we think that we are looking for God or the holy. Here are the lyrics that really stand out for me today:

*What if God was one of us?  
Just a slob like one of us  
... Just a stranger on the bus  
...Just tryin' to make his way home  
Like a holy rolling stone  
back up to heaven all alone  
Just tryin' to make his way home  
Nobody callin' on the phone  
'cept for the Pope maybe in Rome.<sup>4</sup>*

Are we willing, in our stressful, busy, strange lives, to hear the beep and take what might be the call of our Creator, the presence of Christ, on the other line? It might be that God is right in front of us, but these days more than ever, the chaos, the din of life, can prevent us from listening to that persistent beep. So. Call waiting – will we answer? Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> John chapter 1, verse 54

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5G5XzQN\\_SDM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5G5XzQN_SDM) Joan Osborne performing One Of Us. • © 1995 Warner/Chappell Music, Inc.