

Delmer Chilton tells the story about when he was a child living next door to his grandparents. He said that he would eat breakfast with them about 3 or 4 times a week. His story is one I can relate to because I, too, lived next door to my grandparents and I looked forward to the times when I could eat a meal with them.

Delmer says it was good to eat breakfast with his grandparents because his Aunt Mildred lived with them and was a great cook and made especially wonderful biscuits; but it was bad because you could not talk during breakfast because his grandparents and Aunt Mildred, had to listen to their favorite program while they ate: THE MOODYS OBITUARY COLUMN OF THE AIR.

I had to laugh when I heard this because I remember the little radio station in Siler City where we used to live that ran the daily obituary sponsored by the local funeral home. I occasionally listen to the station out of the little town of Richburg because I like their music selection but they also run the daily obituary. I don't think I have ever heard a daily obituary on any of the stations that target young adults.

Delmer says the daily obituary started like every daily obit that I have ever heard on the radio.

It started with somber organ music, and then a deep, bass voice would intone,

John Doe of 334 Mockingbird Lane passed away last evening at Northern Surry Hospital. He is survived by . . . He was employed by . . . He was a member of . . . Funeral to be held at . . . conducted by the Rev. . . . Memorials may be sent to . . . etc.

for about 5 to 10 names, all read with great dignity by that deep, deep voice.

Delmer says he was about 5 or 6 at the time and concluded that the voice on the radio was the voice of God. Who else would know all those things about a person, all those details? Delmer said that the church he attended put a lot of stress on the Second Coming and the Rapture. They really talked a lot about whether or not you'd be ready to go when the Man Upstairs decided it was your turn to face the Final Judgment.

So, Delmer decided the voice on the radio was God. And God was sending out a message: "These are the ones I took last night. Are you ready to meet your maker?"

One day, Delmer was dropped off at Elmer's Barber Shop to get a haircut while his Dad ran over to town to get a truckload of fertilizer. He had just learned to read a bit and was very happily looking through the Boys Life magazines when he got scared out of his skin.

The man in the chair opened his mouth and out came that oh so familiar voice:

"Elmer, could you take a little more off around the ears?"

Oh my God, he said to himself. Yes MY GOD was there, right there with me in that Barber Shop. Delmer says he knew then that his time had come. It was his time to face God and the final judgment. But he says he wasn't ready to face the final judgment. So he decided to hide in the bathroom at the barber shop until God had finished getting his hair cut.

The two stories we have read this morning are both call stories. But there are clear differences in them. In the Old Testament story of Samuel, the boy Samuel hears a voice. A voice which calls out to him in the night. A voice which he thinks is his friend and priest Eli but by the end of the story we discover that this voice is from God. The voice of God calling upon Samuel to be a prophet.

For some people, that is the way they encounter God. A voice of one calling from the wilderness. A voice which speaks to them in a dream. A voice which gives them guidance concerning a decision which they are facing. For some of us, the calling from God comes through a voice that you can look to and say, see, God is calling me to do whatever with my life.

But did you notice how Nathaniel got his calling from God? Nathaniel's calling came from the voice of a friend. Jesus is traveling along in Galilee and Jesus sees Philip and Jesus says to Philip to come and "follow me." Philip is another one who has a clear voice from the Son of God to call him into service.

But Nathaniel is another story. Nathaniel is minding his own business when Philip finds him and begins to tell him a story. Philip tells Nathaniel, "we have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote. This is Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth."

But Nathanael is a skeptic and does not accept things at face value. “Can anything good come out of Nazareth,” he asks? But when Nathanael meets up with Jesus, he discovers that Jesus already knows who he is. Nathanael is known by Jesus before Nathanael knows who Jesus is.

Who is God calling today? So many times we only look in house to seek out who God is calling today. Many of us have an assumption that one must be an active Christian to be called by God to some specific purpose and reason. But the life of Nathanael tells us something different. Nathanael was not a follower of Jesus when a friend of his told him a story. This friend speaking to Nathanael became Nathanael’s call story.

I think that we in the Christian church need to seek to discover who God is calling. And guess what, the souls that God is calling to do great things may not be inside the church building during morning worship services. The souls that God may be calling to do great things are many times outside of the church building. The souls that God may be calling are people that God knows but who may not know God. Or at least the way we think they should know God.

Those of us inside the church need to be very careful that we don’t limit the ones who God is calling. So many times when we in the church try to figure out who has the gifts that are blessed by God, we only pay attention to the ones who are active in the church. We look to folks who are the most active. We look for folks that are the most responsible in fulfilling their church responsibilities. We look for folks that are the biggest financial givers.

But the story of Nathanael teaches us that we do not just need to be looking in house. We need to be out there. We need to be out there telling our stories to people who are outside of this place. Those ones out there are the ones that God may be calling to do important things that God is yearning for them to accomplish.

So who are the ones outside the church that God may be calling? Phillip told his story to Nathanael, a very skeptical person. Who is someone you know who is very skeptical? Who is someone you know who is very skeptical of the Christian faith?

Who is someone you know who is very skeptical of God? Could it be that this person who you describe as skeptical could very well be the person that God is calling to do something important? Could it be that this person who you describe as skeptical could very well be the person that God is using you to have a conversation with about what God is up to in your life?

Or maybe, you are the skeptic who feels as though you have wandered into a church service today. Maybe you are the skeptic that does not understand why you are here. Maybe you are the skeptic that has lots of doubts and you feel like by being in a church that you are in a strange and alien place with people who seem to be so sure.

Well guess what. God calls skeptics. God calls skeptics and God calls skeptics through the voice of friends of who say, "Come and see."

Maybe you are the one that is being pushed to reach out to your skeptic friend.

Maybe you are the skeptic that God is calling into something really important.
AMEN.

-Chilton, Delmer, <http://lectionarylab.blogspot.com/2012/01/year-b-second-sunday-after-epiphany.html>

-Text: I Samuel 3 and John 1:43-51

-Given: January 15, 2012 in Allison Creek Pres. (York, SC)