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Calling the Unqualified
1 Samuel 3:1-10; John 1:43-51

The most common response that I receive when I call to inform people that they have been nominated or elected as deacon is “Well, I don’t think I’m qualified.” And I agree. Over the years, I haven’t met many people qualified to be a deacon in the church. But God calls them anyway. The truth is that none of us are “qualified,” so to speak, to be deacons or pastors or even disciples of Jesus. God doesn’t ask for a resume of our accomplishments or require us to meet certain specifications in order to be a deacon, pastor, or disciple. In other words, God calls the unqualified.

The good news is that we are in good company. The two stories that we have read this morning highlight this. The boy Samuel was serving in the temple, training to be a minister under the tutelage of the old, soon-to-be retired pastor Eli. One night, while they were sleeping, the child Samuel heard a voice calling to him. Thinking literally and logically about who could be calling him, Samuel naturally pinned it on Eli. But Eli told Samuel that it wasn’t him, go back to bed, he must be hearing things. Then, ensued a back and forth between God and Samuel, Samuel and Eli. Finally, Eli came out of his deep sleep and to his senses and realized that God was calling the boy. He told Samuel how to respond the next time the voice called, “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.”

In John’s Gospel, something similar happens. The disciples of John are following John in anticipation of the one whom about whom John has been preaching. They are listening, looking, waiting. Finally, Jesus appears in the wilderness to be baptized by John. John tells his disciples, “Well, boys, there he is, the one I’ve been telling you about. What are you waiting for? Follow him.” They do. Along the way, they recruit other disciples. And Jesus himself directly calls others to follow him in his ministry.

In both stories, God calls the unqualified. Samuel was only a boy. He hadn’t even finished elementary school, or puberty, much less the seminary training he would need to be a minister. The only thing he could have put on his resume was that he was training

under the well-known preacher Eli. Yet, God called his name, calling him to give his life to serve as the new spiritual leader of God's people.

Then, there are the disciples, at least one of which didn't think Jesus was qualified to be the Messiah, "Nazareth! Are you kidding me? Surely, God's Messiah couldn't come from there?" Of course, neither Nathanael nor the other disciples had much room to talk. Maybe the comment was a reflection of himself and the others Jesus was calling, the pot calling the kettle black, so to speak. Maybe he was saying, "Who him? Us?" Nevertheless, this is whom God sent, Jesus of Nazareth, and these were the ones whom God called. In terms of qualifications and promise to be rabbi's, which is what Jesus was, and rabbis typically only called disciples to become rabbis like them, the twelve Jesus chose were the rejects, those who had not been selected by other rabbis and therefore had chosen other professions and careers. It was almost embarrassing to get the second call, their second choice, especially from this carpenter's son from the not-so-impressive town of Nazareth. Yet, here God is calling the unqualified to do God's work.

If God needed something done, then we would have expected for God to have chosen people more qualified than a boy and some questionable group of rough-neck fishermen, IRS employees, and over-zealous politicians, not to mention the women and children, the sick and the criminals, the poor and the low-lives that Jesus later called. But this is whom God chose. God chose them not because of their so-called "qualifications," their impressive resumes or experience or character traits. God chose them because that's the nature of God and the essence of God's gospel/good news. God chooses all of us. God loves us. And God desires us to serve. The gospels really only give three "qualifications" for being one of Jesus' followers: Follow him, look to him, believe in him. In other words, when Jesus calls, answer "Yes." And that call requires our service, us giving ourselves to love and serve others in the way that God is calling us.

I wish I got paid for every time someone told me that I am too young to be a preacher. I even tried to grow a beard once to hopefully make me look older. It didn't work. Don't get me wrong; I hear what they are saying. I'm not old enough to have experienced life, to be touched by the sting of death, to have known what it is like to experience true hardship, I haven't had enough experience in life to have anything to say

or to walk with people in their pain. What they are saying is that they are not sure if I'm qualified. But I have learned over the years that God calls the unqualified.

Today, our newly elected deacons are a chiropractor, an electrician, a schoolteacher, a retired Lowes employee, and a small business owner, respectively. Their gifts and skills in the working world does not "qualify" them for deacon. But what does qualify them is that they have done this before. They have answered the call to serve in whatever capacity God has called them, to give of their time, their gifts, them selves to serving God, the church, and this community. The main thing that qualifies them is that they have said "yes" to God, "Yes" as followers of Jesus, "Yes" to being more like Jesus in every aspect of their life, the most important of which is the transformation of their heart and life to love and serve others. They are testimony that when God calls us, as unqualified as we all are, we have been given the gift to say, "Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening."