To the one who searches us out and knows us

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Epiphany +2b – 1 Sam 3 1-10, Ps 139 1-18, 1 Cor 6 12-20, Jn 1 43-51

To the one who searches us out and knows us, Amen

Epiphany is the season when we celebrate God's appearing to all of us outsiders. During this season, our Scriptures call us to notice one special way that God has of appearing to people; by calling them; calling us. A call is one of the more forceful ways God appears to us. But it has to be, because often we don't hear, or we won't hear, or sometimes we hear something else and mistake it for God. Sometimes God is direct about it, like with the boy Samuel. Other times, our life as we know it can suddenly, unaccountably fall to bits, and we have to start again on a new path.

We humans are often amazingly slow at recognising that God *is* calling us. But God persists, and a funny thing is that when *we just can't see it*, it's often quite obvious to even the most casual onlooker. There seems to be a moment in every Christian's life when someone like the greengrocer tells us that God is trying to get through to us. If we're lucky, we may even meet two such people in a lifetime.

The obvious thing that today's Scriptures are saying to us is that God calls people. You don't need any particular qualifications before God will call you. Samuel's youth and inexperience show us that age is no barrier. Nor is understanding. Samuel didn't even know God; he hadn't learned the scriptures when God called him. Other parts of Scripture show us that people don't need squeaky clean moral qualifications for a call either – or special piety or even

humility. Today's Psalmist reveals that the Call of God is something that's basic to being human:

… you have created my inward parts: you knit me together in my mother's womb.

…You knew my soul and my bones were not hidden from you

when I was formed in secret, and woven in the depths of the earth …

'I was called by God,' says the Psalmist; 'I was called before I was even born.' In fact, the last line of v.14 suggests that the Psalmist was called from the dust that God drew together to form the first human being. 'My purpose', sings the Psalmist, 'my purpose was thought through by God before time ever dawned.' At the most basic level, we're here because God has called us into being; called us to be who we can truly become; called us to be that together. It's lovely, isn't it! There must be a catch. Well there is, but the catch is also rather lovely.

The catch is that when God calls us, God doesn't just call for little bits of us; things like 'intellectual assent', or a week's commitment: God's not satisfied by these; God's not necessarily satisfied by a 'good life' either: *Yes, I'm a Christian; I mean I obey the Ten Commandments.*

God, not satisfied? No, I'm afraid we had that other reading today too – from that confronting old apostle Paul. And he's adamant – like he always is – adamant that God calls the whole person: body, mind, ethics, feelings, loyalties, soul, freedoms, time … the whole lot. That's quite a catch, isn't it!

But I did say it's a lovely catch. The lovely bit is towards the end of what Paul writes. Don't you know, says Paul; don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Paul's a bit like the greengrocer I mentioned; one of those people

with that galling knack of stating the obvious; telling us just how close God is to us … as close as our own mind, heart, soul, body. And we together are the body of Christ.

Think back to your memories of the Samuel story. Samuel would go on to oppose the people when they wanted to replace God's judges with a king. Then he went on to call kings to account. It's a dangerous thing to heed God's call. Samuel spoke God's mind into his time. He proclaimed God's opposition to injustice and betrayal – he proclaimed God's call to people to be just and loyal – to live God's love.

We, the body of Christ are called, both corporately and individually, to speak that mind of God into our own time too. Whatever God may ask of you or me individually is for us to discover. But there's no question that God calls us as the Church to confront the issues of injustice and betrayal that plague our time: unjust war; abuse of refugees; avoidable homelessness and hunger; obscene disparities in wealth between rich and poor; the unethical collusion of politics, money and media to create a false world view in the pursuit of power – our particular curse right now.

God calls us to confront these wrongs in Jesus's name because we are called to be God's shopfront to the world. Jeremiah taught that we are God's clothing. Teresa of Avila said, we are God's hands, feet, face. People are meant to encounter God's call to justice and loyalty and honesty – to encounter God's love for them – through the Church. So while an individual call might be very tricky to pin down, corporately, it's clear who we're called to be. People who embody God's love. Amen