

May I speak in the name of God, Father, Son Holy Spirit, Amen.

I have just spent best part of this week in silent prayer at St Buenos retreat house in North Wales. It's a place of complete silence to help the retreaters more clearly hear the voice of God, a place where the noise of the world is silenced for a while. Given the recent news, I clearly chose a very good week to be there.

This morning we have heard three very beautiful readings and inspired by my week away, I'd like to gently draw your attention to the remarkably poetic game of peekaboo playing out within them. A biblical poetry that cuts through empty noise and connects with what is good and true and beautiful, to hear the voice of God.

'Samuel! Samuel!' God calls to the sleeping boy.

It is hard to gauge tones of voice in scripture. We end up guessing, including in this story. Was it a soft 'Samuel, Samuel'?

Or, was it a loud and booming 'Samuel! Samuel!'

The tone of voice often depends on the context?

In this case, a sleeping Samuel is in the temple, resting in the presence of God, but he doesn't know it maybe the voice is gently waking him from his ignorant slumber .. or maybe it's loudly booming to draw his attention to what he has not seen.

I wonder how you hear the voice of God in this story, does it change at all if you replace the name of Samuel with your own name?

If this becomes your story then at which point do you find yourself at?

Are you asleep in the presence of God;

are you stirring in the half-light wondering who it is you can hear;

or are you fully awake and ready to listen to the voice which is either gently or loudly calling your name.

It's worth taking note of these things.

It's also interesting to note how Eli responds to all that is going on.

The wise older man, slowly opens one eye, sees what this is all about and chooses not to say too much, resists the urge to directly name God or tell Samuel what's happening. Wise people clearly choose their words carefully.

In this case Eli knows how important it is for a person to personally recognise God and so he gently directs Samuel to be able to do so.

Eli knows that a calling is between person and God.

Your calling cannot be brokered by another because it is an intimately unfolding relationship of recognition.

'Peekaboo' to paraphrase God.

We play the game of 'Peekaboo' for almost all of our lives.

Wrapped in those simple hand gestures are very early memories of delight, surprise, and perhaps even relief, when the disappearing faces became visible again.

Then in later years playing it with children, it is revealed to be a game about belief ... or 'grasping the concept of impermanence' as child experts might put it.

At first a baby only believes what it can see. But then they begin to understand that a thing can exist - namely a parent behind two hands - even when they aren't visible. And wrapped in this is an evolution of emotion; from those initial feelings of mild panic and despair there is growth into delight and hopeful anticipation. Crucially, we all learn that something doesn't need to be always visible in order to be believed in, in order to exist.

Sometimes the calling of us by God can feel like a game of Peekaboo.

But in quietly listening, and waiting, and watching ... any feelings of panic and despair can evolve into feelings of delight and hopeful anticipation. Especially if we move our own hands from our face, just as Eli led Samuel to remove his.

Peekaboo to paraphrase God.

It is written that 'The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread' and it might be written that the word of the Lord is rare in *these* days; visions are not widespread. It might be written that thoughtless words and a disappearing poetic imagination have diminished the idea of any invisible reality and mystery.

And, it is a reality and a mystery; this idea of being known by God, and being called by God, to recognise and respond to what is true and good.

It is a mystery so immense and so full of light and love that many find themselves here intrigued. Whether peeking through their hands, whether peeping with one eye open, or sat looking silently into the half-light. It is a mystery that endlessly calls to us whether we know it or not.

It is rooted in the same mystery that formed us in the womb and that knows our most intimate thoughts and ways. Not as some controlling machiavellian type of deity, but as one who purely delights in us. It's hard to accept, but it is all there in the psalm. God delights in our hiding, in our seeking, in our attempts to work things out and to live well. He doesn't wait for a finished article, but revels in our fashioning day by day, whether we are journeying or resting.

He sees things. He sees everyone of us.

'Come and see' Phillip to Nathanael.

Nathanael sees Christ.

Christ sees Nathanael and recognises him.

'Where did you come to know me?' asks Nathanael.

'I saw you' says Christ.

And Nathanael sees the Son of God.

Peekaboo, to paraphrase God.

How would you hear his tone of voice if you were sat under the fig tree as the one being recognised by Christ. Is he rushed and harassed, or is he gently nurturing and calling and inviting.

Is he delighted or indifferent that another may join in with his mission of love. Surely, it always has to be delight. That particular smile and joy that comes in a moment of mutual recognition.

It is often forgotten that 'calling' is always first a revelation of God's immense joy in your being. It is a moment of being recognised. In turn it God's delight when we recognise his personal presence in our lives. By name he calls you to hold out your hands to receive and see him, just as he calls you forward today to receive the mystery of his love in the bread and the wine, or at the hand of his blessing.

From under that fig tree, in the warmth of the sun, I invite you to take a moment to look back into the eyes of the God who gazes upon you.

The One who knows you because he knows the incredible mystery of the light-filled miracle that first created you and endlessly loves you.

Today's readings are a guidebook for our personal relationship with God.
Take them home and sit with them in the quiet.

Listen for Him calling your name.
And simply say 'I'm listening'.

Listen for Him saying 'come and see'.
And simply recognise his presence.

And see what he shows to you.

Amen