We are now in Ordinary Time. Some might think this is the time when nothing interesting is going on. No special expectation, no ‘Glorias’ or ‘Hallelujahs.’ Just the humdrumness of everyday life. Yet, in reality, this is really where we live most of our lives. Most time is ‘ordinary time,’ and if it is humdrum, it is because we have not learned to see beneath the surface of things.

Today’s first reading and gospel passage have been identified as ‘call narratives.’ They each recount the call of those who would eventually make a significant difference in the history of salvation. As is the case with all ‘call narrative,’ these accounts are anything but ordinary. In the first reading, Samuel, an apprentice to Eli the priest at Shiloh, is awakened by a call from God. At first neither he nor Eli recognized the divine origin of that call. Eventually Eli realized what was transpiring and instructed Samuel to respond positively to the voice and to stand open to its direction. The passage from John’s gospel contains several of the same elements. Just as Eli directed Samuel to God, so John the Baptist pointed two of his own disciples to Jesus. In both instances, the call took place in the ordinary circumstances of the individuals’ lives. Under the direction of their mentors those receiving the call left those mentors to follow God in a very different way. Samuel would be the prophet who anointed Saul and David, the first kings of Israel; Andrew would become one of the Jesus’ closest followers.

What makes these stories extraordinary is the means through which God spoke to these individuals. Samuel did not grasp what was happening to him. He did not know what had awakened him. The insight onto who was calling was Eli’s. Neither Andrew nor the other disciple of John saw anything extraordinary in that man in the crowd. He was simply one among many. The insight into his true identity was John’s.

Too often we miss the extraordinary in what we consider to be simply ordinary. If we are lucky, there might be someone who will point the extraordinary out to us. Still, this does not happen automatically. Like Samuel and John’s disciples, we must be open to the explanation of others. If we expect God to speak to us exclusively through thunder and lightning, we will miss the gentle whisper in the night or the redirection of our focus.

These readings say something else about the call of God. Not only does it come to us through others, but we too are often the voice through whom God speaks to those others. This means that we must be able to discern God in the ordinary events of life. We too must help others to recognize God in the experiences of their lives. And then, like Eli and John, we too must step
back and allow others to follow their call, even if that call might take them away from our guidance.

Such a life is anything but humdrum.