

Epiphany 2, Yr. B

January 14, 2018

1 Samuel 3:1-10; John 1:43-51

There's a sentence in the first reading that catches the eye: The word of the Lord was rare in those days. Interesting to compare that with the words in the Eucharistic Prayer which say: Your word has never been silent. I'd like us to think about that this morning. Is the word of the Lord rare? Or is it that we aren't really listening for it?

And the reading from John has a line that poses a similar question. In the part of John's Gospel just before what we heard this morning, John the Baptist was standing with two of his disciples when Jesus walked by and John identified him by saying – Look, there's the Lamb of God. Those two disciples, one of whom was Andrew, then followed Jesus and when he noted that they were following, he turned and asked them, "What are you looking for?" They didn't answer directly, but instead asked their own question, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" And Jesus answers, "Come and see." The text doesn't say what they saw or what they talked about with Jesus, but following that visit, Andrew passed the news along to Peter by telling him, "We have found the Messiah!" which brought Peter to Jesus. Today we see the same pattern. Phillip follows Jesus and then tells Nathanael. When Nathanael scoffs about Jesus being from Nazareth, Philip uses those same words: COME AND SEE.

You probably know that church growth people tell us that people will come to a church most often on the invitation of someone that they know and trust, when that person invites them by, in effect, saying the same thing Andrew and Philip said: COME AND SEE.

Part of what we're seeing in the Gospel and in the reading from Samuel is that people on a spiritual journey need one another; that they sort of hand each other along. In the Samuel case, the text tells us that he did not yet know the Lord. So, when he heard that calling in the night, he never gave it a thought that it might be someone other than Eli. But Eli, with his experience and wisdom, recognized the call for what it was and was able to guide Samuel along.

Epiphany is the feast of light. Light in the sense the Jesus is manifesting himself. But also light in the sense that we suffer from spiritual blindness – so we'll hear the story of Nicodemus who, when Christ says he needs to be born from on high, gets all tangled up with obstetrics, or the story of the woman at the well who, when Jesus tells her about living water, wonders about buckets. Both of them eventually come to SEE, to understand who Jesus really is – they see the light, so to speak. And, like them, we need the light of Christ to understand what's going on and to show us the way to live.

I don't know how many of you have had either a formal spiritual director, or what's sometimes called a spiritual friend – in both cases, they are people with whom we talk about our spiritual lives, our journeys. They share their experiences and their wisdom, shedding light on OUR paths. And the question that usually frames the conversation can be put in a couple of different ways. Sometimes the question is, WHERE DO YOU SEE GOD WORKING IN YOUR LIFE? But sometimes the question, and I think this might be a bit better, is : WHERE HAVE YOU SEEN THE FACE OF GOD TODAY?

I'd like us to think about that question and maybe even take it home and use it on a daily basis. I would say, though, as I know I've said so many times before, how we do this, where we look, will depend on who we think God is. If you think that God is an angry, punishing figure, you'll look and interpret what you see in one way. Think, for instance of someone like Jerry Falwell who interpreted the airplane crashes into the towers and the Pentagon as God's way of punishing us, of telling us of his displeasure with abortionists, pagans, feminists, the ACLU, People for the American Way, etc. (Dallas Morning News) As you can imagine, that's not what I'm talking about, because that's not the God that I understand, the God revealed in Christ, who is compassionate, healing, forgiving, loving. So, when I think of that question, WHERE DID YOU SEE THE FACE OF GOD TODAY, I think of where I saw those qualities exhibited. Where did I see grace, or generosity, love, compassion or self-sacrifice?

This question came up in this week's lectionary class. We had begun talking, in the abstract, about churches in which standing up and giving a testimonial was common practice. So, in that small group, we decided to move it from the abstract to the real, to go around and share with one another either how God was touching our lives, or where we saw the face of God. With their permission, I'd like to share a couple of those stories with you.

One was from John. Many of you know that his niece and nephew recently lost their very young daughter after a struggle that began with her birth and recently ended with her death. During those years, Autumn was in the hospital numerous times, always connected to wires and tubes and always dressed in hospital garb. John's niece decided to add a touch of grace to Autumn's life and made her colorful dresses that she could wear when she was in the hospital, so that she would feel, at least somewhat, like a normal little girl. Autumn recently died, but her mother extended her gift to all the little girls who were suffering as Autumn had and is making dresses for all of them, creating some beauty and some light in an otherwise dismal world. And one was from Jane, who began by reminding us that she's fast coming up on her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. When she went to Montana to visit family at Christmas, she took the opportunity to talk with her granddaughters about the fact that her life may very well be over soon – that she wasn't afraid and that she felt the presence of God. She wanted to reassure them and relieve any fears they might have by letting them know of her faith that death was nothing more than rebirth into a new and glorious life.

A bit further afield – I recently read some more of Brian Doyle's essays. He's a master at paying the kind of attention that allows him to see the face of God in what we might think of as mundane things. One example: Doyle says that he was attending a meeting in New York about seven months after 9/11. The meeting, he said, was filled with uninformed opinions and droning speeches and by evening he decided to skip out and walk some of the city. He ended up on 100<sup>th</sup> Street, footsore and yearning for a beer. So he stepped into a bar. It wasn't crowded. One table of men looked like telephone linemen; there was one table of several businesswomen. Interestingly enough, there was a young marine in full dress uniform, flanked by two older men, maybe his father and uncle, with their hands affectionately on his shoulders. As he watched, he said, the young Marine waved off his uncle's offer to pay for his drink and he thought that that gentle tender gesture would be the highlight of his evening. But then the door opened and two young firemen walked in, not in dress uniform, but in their FDNY shirts and

work boots. They took a few steps toward the bar and then, Doyle said, something happened that I will never forget. Everyone in the bar stood up, silently. The table of women stood up first, I noticed, and then everyone else stood up, including me. I thought perhaps someone would start to applaud but no one made a sound. The men standing at the bar turned and faced the firemen, and then the young Marine drew himself up straight as a tree and saluted the firemen, and then his father and uncle saluted too and then everyone else in the bar saluted the firemen. There wasn't a sound in the place. After a few seconds one of the firemen nodded to everyone and the other made a slight gesture of acknowledgement with his right hand and the bartender set two beers on the bar and everyone sat down again, and everything went on as before, but not. (*Eight Whopping Lies* by Brian Doyle)

We see the face of God usually through the face of other people. One way of saying that is that each of us is made in the image of God. We know that, but sometimes that image is hard to see. Rachel Remen in her book about her Grandfather's blessings, (*My Grandfather's Blessings*) calls this the divine spark within each of us. She notes that we often fail to see it – we get derailed by their appearance, or age, or illness or anger or meanness. But, she suggests, that when we recognize that spark, that face of God, it's like we are blowing on it with our attention, much as we would blow on the embers of a campfire and thus we strengthen it no matter how deeply it has been buried or for how long. When we bless someone, we touch the unborn goodness in them. Everything unborn in us and in the world needs blessing.

So, each day, keep watch for the face of God. Recognize it, pay attention to it, celebrate it, give thanks for it, bless it, and then perhaps hand someone else along by sharing it with them. Amen.