

2 Epiphany, Yr. B

January 17, 2021

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

It's been a rough couple of weeks, so I think it would be good for all of us if we started this morning with a bit of humor. Someone has suggested that, when you read that passage from Samuel, the lesson is that you shouldn't fall asleep in church. There's a story, an old one I gather, about a fellow who kept falling asleep during the sermon. The preacher was getting frustrated, and so, one Sunday, as the fellow started nodding off, the pastor said to the congregation, "Everyone who wants to go to heaven, please stand up." Everyone did except, of course, for the sleeper. The preacher had everyone sit down and then quietly said, "Now, everyone who wants to go to hell," and with a bang on the pulpit and a shout said, "stand up!" The sleeping man snorted awake and jumped to his feet as everyone around him started to snicker. He looked at everyone around him and then at the pastor and said, "Preacher, I don't know what we're voting on, but it looks like you and me are the only ones for it!"

Looking at that text more seriously, though, you'll remember that Samuel's mother was Hannah and when she prayed for a son, she promised that she would dedicate him to a life of service at the Temple. It's an interesting passage, not just about not falling asleep, but also for noting a couple of things. The first is that, since this is the Epiphany season and we're using the theme of light and enlightenment, we note that both Samuel and Eli came to realize what was going on only gradually. It's on the 4th call from God that Samuel is able to respond. The other thing to note is that we need each other to understand. In this case, without Eli, it's possible that Samuel would never have been able to respond to God's call. In the same way, I think most of us come to seeing, to enlightenment, gradually. Perhaps some, like Paul, are

knocked off a horse, but I think for most of us it's a process of growth. One of my favorite passages is the one where Jesus cures the blind man, or tries to, but on the first try, when he asks the fellow if he can see, the response is, yes, I can see people, but they look like trees moving around. It worked better the second time.

Coming to see, to understand, and the need for each other – that's also what we're hearing in the Gospel. In the passage just before this, John the Baptist sees Jesus walking along and points him out to a couple of his disciples, Andrew and a friend, and then says, there is the Lamb of God. So they follow Jesus. When he turns, his first question is WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR? And that could be its own sermon topic. They respond by asking him where he's staying and he invites them to COME AND SEE. There's nothing in the text to say what they saw or what they talked about, but when Andrew left Jesus, he found Peter and told him to also come and see because they had found the Messiah. And then Jesus tells Philip, FOLLOW ME, and then Philip finds Nathanael and so it goes. When Nathanael expresses his doubt that anything good can come from Nazareth, that nothing place, Philip's response is the same as Jesus' – COME AND SEE.

All this is in John's Gospel, but there's another story in the Synoptics about John. When Herod had John in prison, John sent some of his disciples to Jesus to ask him: ARE YOU THE ONE? Or should we wait for another? And you'll remember Jesus' reply, which has to do with SEEING: Go back and tell John what you SEE: The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them.

There's a pattern here: first you are looking for something. In the text, they were looking for the Messiah. So the first question for us may be to ask what we are looking for? Maybe it's a deeper understanding of

God, maybe it's meaning and purpose in our lives, maybe it's community, maybe it's a closer relationship with God, maybe it's forgiveness, or a vision of different possibilities. So, first the searching. And then the invitation to come and see. And then, it's about going and telling what it is you have seen. Handing along what you have received just like the disciples in this morning's Gospel reading.

By now, I'm sure each of you has received my letter about the incredible gift we received from Sarah Wright's estate. It's a little like winning the lottery. And it puts me in mind of that priest friend of mine in Dallas who always hoped to win the lottery. In fact, she was thinking of having a T-shirt made that said, LORD, PLEASE GIVE ME THE CHANCE TO SHOW YOU THAT WINNING THE LOTTERY WON'T SPOIL ME. But then she herself acknowledged what a temptation it would be: I WOULD LIKE TO THINK I WOULD GIVE IT ALL AWAY, she said, BUT I KNOW THAT AT SOME POINT I'D BE THINKING ABOUT THAT LAKE HOUSE THAT I ALWAYS WANTED AND DESERVED. That's sort of where we are right now as a congregation. If you issued an invitation to friends to COME AND SEE St. Luke's (and I hope you do) what will they see? Will they find people who are listening for the voice of God, people who recognize that we're all temples of the Holy Spirit as Paul says in the Corinthians letter, will they find followers of Christ who are committed to lives of generosity, compassion, and love? And here I would turn our attention back to the collect in which we pray to be people illumined by God's Word and Sacraments, people who shine with the radiance of Christ's glory so that Christ may be known to the ends of the earth.

I'd like to close with one more story. It's told in Jonathan Kozol's book, *Amazing Grace*, about children in an Episcopal parish in the Bronx, led by a priest who had had a high-power career in finance before ordination and who, at the time he was writing, was devoting her life to

trying to ease all the pain the world has to offer a poor and marginalized community. In the midst of it all, she offers blessing and hope. Kozol talked with some of the kids and one of them, a 7-year old named Elio talks about asperges – that delightful ritual we use on occasions like Baptism, where the priest sprinkles holy water on everyone. I wish we could do that today. Elio calls it “whole-flea” water and says that Mother Martha sprinkles it with a big spoon and that the water comes from under the church or from a special faucet somewhere in the church. His understanding is a bit cloudy, but he’s not at all confused about the blessing it all is. When Mother Martha sprinkles holy water over Elio, his face is radiant. But so is hers. Both of them are laughing. Kozol says that someone once told him that holy water blesses those who receive it but also those who give it. In this way, the healing the blessing brings goes back and forth. He says, “It’s easy to believe this when you see the priest mobbed by all the little ones when she comes down the stairs into the afterschool holding the bowl of holy water in her hands. “Of all the things I do here at this church, she says, this is the part I love the most.” Weariness and worry over tragedies and troubles of all kinds seemed to drop away. The kids came running when they saw her. Kozol said what he heard was, “Bless me, mother.”

“Me, too, mother.”

“Don’t forget me, Mother.”

“Bless me.” “Bless me.” “Bless me.”

Those are the cries we hear when we listen to the world. And we are the people called to be instruments of blessing. Amen.