

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 2nd Sunday of Epiphany, January 14, 2024.

Today's lessons are particularly intriguing. They get our attention and then spend time with us.

The Old Testament lesson from the First Book of Samuel (**I Samuel 3:1-20**) is much longer than most Sunday lessons. And intentionally so. It describes how long it took for Samuel to understand that it was God speaking to Samuel, not Eli speaking to Samuel.

Maybe I'm just speaking for myself, but this notion of faith "taking some time" to take hold is common, not rare. Very few of us, I think, jumped up from bed and turned our lives over to God. Whatever the level of our faith, the development of that faith was and is a process. It is not a snap of the fingers. It wasn't when Jesus first caught our attention, and it's still not a snap.

We are really intrigued, but we might be just shy of being convinced. To use the language from today's lesson, our ears tingle (**I Samuel 3:11**). They don't blast. The Risen Christ doesn't knock us down. No, for most of us, I suspect, the Risen Christ shook us just a little, and then a little more, and then more still, and here we are. "It is the Lord" said Eli to Samuel (**I Samuel 3:20**).

Today's Psalm is a conversation between the Lord and people like you and me. In verse one (**Psalms 139:1**), we acknowledge that something is going on. "Lord, you have searched me out and known me." Just how well does the Lord know us? "You know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar."

This sense, which I suspect all of us have right now or have had previously, won't let us go. We can't get it out of our minds. Maybe we can't get it out of our souls. Is it God talking to us? Or is it our imagination? It's one or the other, isn't it. Even if we tell God to "get lost," we are acknowledging God's presence, aren't we? And it's not just a one-time session. Verse 17 of today's Psalm: "If I were to count them, they would be more in number than the sand." (**Psalms 139:17**)

In Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, he makes a similar point. It's an awkward point, but it's an important point. "Or do you not know that your body is a

temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own.” **(I Corinthians 6:15)** You are free to do whatever you please, but freedom doesn’t mean “anything goes.”

Freedom at its best is doing what God intends for you to do, and not doing what God doesn’t intend for you to do. “Anything goes” is not one of the 10 Commandments.

And now we come to today’s Gospel **(John 1:43)**. “Follow me” is the theme. That’s it? Two words? One of which is a pronoun. Yes, “follow me.” Not follow just anyone. No, follow God. Which means follow Jesus. A carpenter from Nazareth. God Incarnate. God in human form. A form that even you, Nathanael, can understand, if you care to. If you’re ready. If you’re curious. If you’re frustrated.

Listen carefully. One word. Jesus. And, if you, Nathanael, do this, “you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” **(John 1:51)**

In Jesus, God, the Creator of the Universe, gives us a straight path to a fuller understanding of our lives. And the assumption of God is that “a fuller understanding of our lives” is what you and I want.

We’re curious people, aren’t we. We’re built to ask questions, to wonder about big things, not just the little stuff. And it’s why we’re here. We are built to wonder, not just about where our next meal will come from, but who we are. Or, perhaps whose we are.

And, as we ask these really big questions, we wander all over the place. We try to consider all possibilities. We have our intellectual integrity to honor, after all. And one of the places where we settle – and we’re here right now – is an institution called the Church. It’s a human institution, and therefore it has its share of faults. But it’s also a divine institution. It is a creation of the Holy Spirit.

It is God’s appointed place for discovery, from the very beginning of things to where we are right now. Positioning ourselves to see “heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Never underestimate what we do in this place and places like it, and in solitary places. We wonder, we scratch our heads, we test alternatives, we don't give in to dead-ends, we keep searching. And when we get a hint of an answer to our biggest questions, we search with even more intensity. We don't throw up our hands. Rather we fall on our knees.

In thanksgiving for a God who loves us in remarkable ways, including the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, you and I gather. We sign up for the school bus and we go to school and we go to school some more and we keep going to school. It's our version of the discussion Jesus had with Philip: "Follow me."

And so we do. At times, our band of brothers and sisters is a rag tag group. At other times it is a consensus group, in sync on the large issues, and at some variance on the smaller ones. Can you say denominations?

And we're comfortable with a consensus identity. We like the common ground, but we don't honor the common ground to the point of dismissing our individual backgrounds. It's a potluck community in more ways than one. And we like potlucks, don't we.

And more than individual dishes, we really like community. Not to the exclusion of individual church experiences, but in gratitude for and respect for the insights and histories of others. We not only pray for one another. We learn from one another. And I'm quite certain that our exchange of backgrounds and insights strengthens us for service.

Our book of worship at St. Christopher's is the Book of Common Prayer. Towards the back of the **Prayer Book, in the section entitled "Prayers," page 827**, is a prayer "For those who influence public opinion." We don't use this prayer very often, but it really fits today, because it's about all of our contributions, individual and corporate. What the prayer calls simply "many voices."

Here it is, and as I read it, think of yourselves as authors of the prayer, not just listeners. And also, on this weekend, let us remember Dr. King, whose words and actions are reflected so well in this special prayer.

Almighty God, you proclaim your truth in every age by many voices: Direct, in our time, we pray, those who speak where many listen and write what many read; that they may do their part in making the heart of this people wise, its mind sound, and its will righteous; to the honor of Jesus Christ our Lord.

One last thought. Thank you for your voices. They make a difference. We learn and grow from one another. In Christ's Name, we pray. *Amen.*

Morning Prayer - Epiphany 2 – January 14, 2024

Hymn 410 – Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven

Praise my soul, the King of heaven; to his feet thy tribute bring;
ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, evermore his praises sing:
Alleluia, alleluia! Praise the everlasting King.

Praise him for his grace and favor to his people in distress;
praise him still the same as ever, slow to chide, and swift to bless:
Alleluia, alleluia! Glorious in his faithfulness.

Father-like he tends and spares us; well our feeble frame he knows;
in his hand he gently bears us, rescues us from all our foes.
Alleluia, alleluia! Widely yet his mercy flows.

Angels, help us to adore him; ye behold him face to face;
sun and moon, bow down before him, dwellers all in time and space.
Alleluia! alleluia! Praise with us the God of grace.

BCP - Page 76 – Epiphany Greeting

Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.
I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of
the earth.

BCP – Pages 79 – Invitation to Confession

Dearly beloved, we have come together in the presence of Almighty God our
heavenly Father, to set forth his praise, to hear his holy Word, and to ask, for
ourselves and on behalf of others, those things that are necessary for our life and
our salvation. And so that we may prepare ourselves in heart and mind to
worship him, let us kneel or sit in silence, and with penitent and obedient hearts
confess our sins that we may obtain forgiveness by his infinite goodness and
mercy.

BCP – Pages 79-80 – Confession and Absolution

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. Amen.

BCP – Page 80 - Gloria

O Lord, open thou our lips.
And our mouth shall show forth thy praise.

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.*

BCP – Page 82 – Venite

Come, let us sing unto the Lord;
 let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.
Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving
 and raise a loud shout to him with psalms.
For the Lord is a great God,
 and a great King above all gods.
In his hand are the caverns of the earth,
 and the heights of the hills are his also.
The sea is his, for he made it,
 and his hands have molded the dry land.
Come, let us bow down, and bend the knee,
 And kneel before the Lord our Maker.
For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.
 Oh, that today you would hearken to his voice!

First Reading – I Samuel 3:1-20

Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17

Lord, you have searched me out and known me;

*You know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts
from afar.*

You trace my journeys and my resting-places

and are acquainted with all my ways.

Indeed, there is not a word on my lips,

but you, O Lord, know it altogether.

You press upon me behind and before

and lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;

it is so high that I cannot attain to it.

For you yourself created my inmost parts;

you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I will thank you because I am marvelously made;

your works are wonderful, and I know it well.

My body was not hidden from you,

while I was being made in secret and woven in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes beheld my limbs, yet unfinished in the womb; all of them were written
in your book;

they were fashioned day by day, when as yet there was none of them.

How deep I find your thoughts, O God!

how great is the sum of them!

If I were to count them, they would be more in number than the sand;

to count them all, my life span would need to be like yours.

Second Reading – I Corinthians 6:12-20

Hymn 127, stanzas 1-3 – Earth has many a noble city

Earth has many a noble city; Bethlehem, thou dost all excel:
out of the lee the Lord from heaven came to rule his Israel.

Fairer than the sun at morning was the star that told his birth,
to the world its God announcing seen in fleshly form on earth.

Eastern sages at his cradle make oblations rich and rare;
see them give, in deep devotion, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Gospel – John 1:43-51

Sermon – The Rev. Charles Rowins

BCP – page 96 - The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven,

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic Church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting. Amen.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic Church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting. Amen.

BCP – page 97 – the Lord’s Prayer

The Lord be with you.

And with thy spirit.

Let us pray.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

BCP – page 97-98 – Suffrages A

Show us your mercy, O Lord;

And grant us your salvation.

Clothe your ministers with righteousness;

Let you people sing with joy.

Give peace, O Lord, in all the world;

For only in you can we live in safety.

Lord, keep this nation under thy care;

And guide us in the way of justice and truth.

Let your way be known upon earth;

Your saving health among all nations.

Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten;

Nor the hope of the poor be taken away.

Create in us clean hearts, O God;

And sustain us with your Holy Spirit.

Collect for 2nd Sunday of Epiphany

Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ’s glory, that he may be known, worshiped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and fo ever. *Amen.*

BCP Prayer for Mission

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: so clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. *Amen.*

BCP – page 101 - The General Thanksgiving

*Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants
give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness
to us and to all whom you have made.*

*We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life;
but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by
our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.*

*And, we, pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly
thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips,
but in our lives, by giving up our selves to your service, and by walking
before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ
our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory
throughout all ages. Amen.*

Announcements

Hymn 717 - America – portions of stanzas 1 and 3

*My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing;
Long may our land be bright with freedom's holy light;
Protect us by thy might, great God, our King.*

BCP – page 59 – Prayer of St. Chrysostom

*Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our
common supplication unto thee, and hast promised through thy well-beloved Son
that when two or three are gathered together in his Name thou wilt be in the
midst of them: Fulfill now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants as may
be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to
come life everlasting. Amen.*

BCP – page 59 – The Grace

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore. *Amen.*

Hymn 62 – Songs of thankfulness and praise

Songs of thankfulness and praise, Jesus, Lord, to thee we raise,
manifested by the star to the sages from afar;
branch of royal David's stem in thy birth at Bethlehem;
anthems be to thee addressed, God in man made manifest.

Manifest at Jordan's stream, Prophet, Priest, and King supreme;
and at Cana, wedding guest in thy Godhead manifest;
manifest in power divine, changing water into wine,
anthems be to thee addressed, God in man made manifest.

Manifest in making whole palsied limbs and fainting soul;
manifest in valiant fight, quelling all the devil's might;
manifest in gracious will, ever bringing good from ill;
anthems be to thee addressed, God I man made manifest.

Manifest on mountain height shining in resplendent light,
where disciples filled with awe thy transfigured glory saw.
when from there thou leddest them steadfast to Jerusalem.
cross and Easter Day attest God in man made manifest.

Dismissal

Alleluia! Alleluia! Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Epiphany 2 Lessons – January 14, 2024

Collect: Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that your people, illumined by our Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshiped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: I Samuel 3:1-20

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. The Lord called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up; and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again. Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up; and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." Then the Lord said to Samuel, "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle. On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I am about to punish his house forever for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice of offering forever." Samuel lay there until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." He said, "Here I am." Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also, if you hide anything from me of all that he told you." So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. Then he said,

“It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him.” As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all of Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord.

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17

Lord, you have searched me out and known me;
you know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar.

You trace my journeys and my resting places
and are acquainted with all my ways.

Indeed, there is not a word on my lips,
but you, O Lord, know it altogether.

You press upon me behind and before
and lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain to it.

For you yourself created my inmost parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I will thank you because I am marvelously made;
your works are wonderful, and I know it well.

My body was not hidden from you,
while I was being made in secret and woven in the depth of the earth.

Your eyes beheld my limbs, yet unfinished in the womb;
all of them were written in your book;

they were fashioned day by day, when as yet there was none of them;

How deep I find your thoughts, O God!

how great is the sum of them!

If I were to count them, they would be more in number than the sand;

to count them all, my life span would need to be like yours.

Second Reading: I Corinthians 6:12-20

“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food,” and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, “The two shall be one flesh.” But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Gospel: John 1:43-51

Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

