



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Epiphany 2, Year B
January 14, 2018

[RCL] 1 Samuel 3:1-10(11-20); Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1:43-51

An overarching theme of the readings for this Sunday is how we receive God and what we do as a result.

1 Samuel 3:1-10 (11-20)

One line of thinking in modern learning theory is that it takes three or more exposures to a message for us to fully understand or learn it. For the prophet Samuel, those three exposures come at once, just before dawn, in the tabernacle holding the ark of the covenant. The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him—that is, he has not yet gained his prophetic powers—so he hears the calls three times, but does not yet understand them. He goes to the aged Eli and, using language that calls back to Moses and the burning bush, states simply, “Here I am,” each time. Eli quickly realizes the source of the call and gives specific instructions to the young Samuel to let God know that Samuel is listening. God’s response picks up on the listening theme and prophesies in a way that will “make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle” (NRSV).

- Where are you hearing the voice of God calling you today? Are you able to listen, to hear it? How might you find space to better hear that call, and what could you do to respond?

Psalm 139: 1-6, 13-18

Notes in the New Oxford Annotated Bible suggest that this psalm is unique in that it is an “individual petition...recording an individual’s experience of God.” Being on your own in the ancient Near East would have been an equally frightening and awe-inspiring experience, without the security of artificial light and comfortable housing that we take for granted. The Psalmist depicts God as both an intimidating presence that is far beyond his or her ability to understand and, at the same time, a warm, nurturing deity who “knit me together in my mother’s womb.” The combination yields an overarching message of comfort: comfort that he or she is a part of all God’s creation and, as in Genesis, that creation is “good.”

- Where do you find your personal experience of God? Is it in the awe of a thunderstorm or a majestic view, or in the innocence of a child’s laugh? How does that experience provide you comfort?

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Paul opens this part of his letter to the Corinthians with a re-statement of their “anything goes” slogan: “All things are lawful for me.” It reminds me of a popular saying from my teenage years: “If it feels good, do it.” I even remember a song with that as a refrain: “If it feels good do it, do it if it’s what you feel.” And, while that hedonistic call may sound appealing to an immature teenage brain, I quickly realized it would be an unsustainable way of living.

Paul is suggesting something similar, and he amends the Corinthian slogan with: “but not all things are beneficial” – beneficial to the individual and, more importantly, to the church community in Corinth. As bodies of Christ, he is calling them to treat their physical and spiritual communities with care, to not defile them, because they are no longer their own, but God’s. And that calls them—and us—to a much higher standard.

- Are there parts of your life where you are being ‘dominated’ (verse 6:12) and not able to be fully open to God? How might you open up that space, either alone or in your church community?

John 1: 43-51

Events are happening quickly in this part of John’s Gospel. Jesus heads toward Galilee, taking Philip with him. Philip, convinced of Jesus’ messiahship, urges Nathanael to join. “Not so quick,” one imagines Nathanael thinking, as he questions Jesus’ birthright. He’s not sure Jesus is from the right place—of the right tribe—and this gets in his way. But instead of shutting down, he stays open and, as a result, is amazed. Jesus knows things about Nathanael that any regular human could not. And this simple sign is all Nathanael needs to proclaim Jesus Son of God and King of Israel. By staying open, Nathanael is set to see the most amazing signs imaginable.

- How do we let superficial things—like birthplace or alma mater or accent—prevent us from truly seeing another? Where are we missing Christ’s presence in our lives today because we don’t stay open, let ourselves see, and be amazed?

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