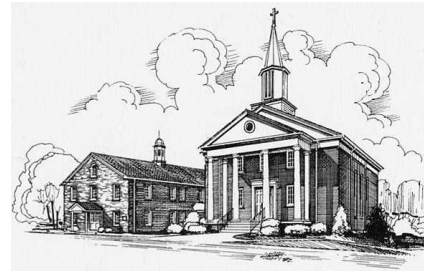


The Lessons Appointed for Use on the
Second Sunday after the Epiphany



Year B
RCL

1 Samuel 3:1-10
Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17
John 1:43-51

The Collect

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, worshipped, 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.

1 Samuel 3:1-10

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.”

Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17 Page 794, BCP

Domine, probasti

- 1 LORD, you have searched me out and known me;
you know my sitting down and my rising up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
- 2 You trace my journeys and my resting-places
and are acquainted with all my ways.
- 3 Indeed, there is not a word on my lips,
but you, O LORD, know it altogether.
- 4 You press upon me behind and before
and lay your hand upon me.
- 5 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain to it.
- 12 For you yourself created my inmost parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
- 13 I will thank you because I am marvelously made;
your works are wonderful, and I know it well.
- 14 My body was not hidden from you,
while I was being made in secret
and woven in the depths of the earth.
- 15 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.
- 16 How deep I find your thoughts, O God!
how great is the sum of them!
- 17 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.

John 1:43-51

The next day 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.”

SERMON

One of the things that makes sermon writing awkward is that each week the Revised Common Lectionary gives us a passage from the middle of a longer account, then invites us to make something of it outside its context. Oh Bullwinkle! That trick never works! Today's passage is one of those. We're in the middle of a longer piece that we need to understand.

John's Gospel is the latest of the four, written after the Jesus community could reflect on what happened a generation or two prior. John has to be read from that perspective or you will wind up all over the place. It's a carefully crafted and mature reflection on the most astonishing thing that ever happened. That makes it uniquely valuable. It does not make it easy. So what is the larger context of today's passage that we need to

understand?

Once upon a time, there was a great architect. His career had gone from success to success, and he was widely acknowledged as the most skilled of his profession. As the culmination of his career, he designed a great building and paid for its construction at his own expense. It was to be the capstone of his career. He was particularly proud of the open, light-filled public spaces, illuminated by great glass windows which had been calculated to the 5th decimal place, carefully balanced and shaped so as to bring in the maximum light while still protecting the integrity of the building. He turned the plans over to the contractor, and waited while the building was completed.

When the work was done and the building occupied, he returned to see his professional life's culmination in

three dimensions. That was where the difficulty began. The guard at the front door told him that he didn't have the proper security credentials to enter. Nobody recognized his name, or knew him as the owner of the building. When he finally did get in what he found, in place of the well-lit public spaces and grand windows he had designed, were tiny windows, up high such that assistance was needed to open or close them. The open public spaces had been cut up into mean little poorly-lit cubicles.

He complained bitterly that his design had been terribly corrupted. He began to attract a small group of tenants who could see what he meant, people who could appreciate how the wonderful design had been debased, and who wished to restore it. He caused so much upset, in fact, that the building management, still failing to

recognize the owner of the building, called security and ejected him from the building by force. Or, as the New Revised Standard Version of the opening of John would have it:

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.¹

Our passage comes from John's accounting of the call of the Disciples by Him who created the world, but returns to it unrecognized and finds his work in shambles. Call by itself accomplishes nothing. Our passage speaks of the importance of response.

I think that if I had been of the Johannine community who are believed to have been the authors of the Gospel of John, and if I was going to relate the call of the first

¹ John 1:10-11 NRSV

Disciples, I would have included some stagecraft to make the thing more memorable. If I had been in on the editing, there would have been some celestial displays or floating angels or SOMETHING, but no.

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!”

That’s just lame! No angels. No trumpets. Not even a decent lightning display. If I had been around, I could have spruced that up considerably! Maybe something like our passage from the Old Testament.

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.”

Remember what I said at the beginning.

John’s Gospel is the latest of the four, written after the Jesus community had had an opportunity to reflect on what happened a generation or two prior. It’s a carefully crafted and mature reflection on the most astonishing thing that ever happened.

When this Gospel gives us such an anti-climactic account of the beginnings of Jesus ministry, we are being told something. We are being told that even though everybody in the building is aware that it’s a mess and a nasty, uncomfortable place, only some are going to rec-

ognize the building owner when He comes. Upon those who do is placed the responsibility to act, not because they are special, but because they are called to serve. A call with no response accomplishes nothing.

It's not difficult to see what is happening today. We have taken His great, light and open public spaces and cut them up into mean, poorly-lit little cubicles, with each of us lifting up one collection of Bible verses or another as the Light, and decrying the vision of our brothers. The Western world, knowing next to nothing about Islam hears of crazy people murdering others and thinks that describes Islam, so they are justified in striking back. The secular world hears of the call of those who answer, and fancy that those ones are overtaken by superstition or worse and so are justified in ignoring them. Here's the challenge: you must play Eli to the

world's Samuel. You must, by your actions, show that even so, you are called to bring light and openness to creation. You are called to do your part, the thing you are called to do. You are to remember that for want of a lowly nail, the shoe was lost; for want of the shoe, the horse was lost; for want of the horse, the rider was lost. Most of all you are not called to fancy yourself as God's peer. You are called to humility.

History teaches us clearly that there will never be a shortage of people who believe that they have grasped the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. History also teaches that very often this truth turns out to be doctrines of hatred, violence and destruction. It is for this reason that we, who have recognized a call, gather together in churches where we can be tested and tried

and, hopefully, not go off the rails. We need to have an Eli as much as we need to be one to the world.

For each of us, I pray that the gift of Nathanael's astonishment be visited upon us daily.

“Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

I believe that we have become so besotted with what clever people we are that we have lost the ability to be astonished by God. We shall not perish for want of wonders, but for want of wonder.²

For our churches, I pray the gift of humility, for I believe that we have acted too frequently as if we had answered the last question about Jesus' identity and that we believe we actually have the power to limit the Holy One to our expectations. My prayer for our churches is that they be restored to the role of Eli, to sharpen the

² G.K Chesterton

ears of those called, to try and to test.

AMEN

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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