

## **EPIPHANY 2B – Jan. 14, 2018**

1 Samuel 3:1-10 [11-20]

Psalm 63:1-8

1 Corinthians 6:11b-20

John 1:43-51

From the time I was small, 65 was the “gold standard” of “golden age”. After today, I am eligible for **ALL** the senior discounts. Both the Christmas season deaths in our parish family were men a few years younger than I am. So, the limits of life are very much on my mind these days. One of the prayers I read at Paul Toth’s funeral included these lines:

*...Make us, we pray, deeply aware of the shortness and uncertainty of human life; and let your Holy Spirit lead us in holiness and righteousness all our days...(p. 504)*

There must be an urgency to our lives. None of us will live forever. As Christians, we believe that Jesus will come in glory to judge the world and bring about the fullness of the kingdom of God – it could happen any minute. Being mindful of each moment, recognizing life for the treasure it is, can bring joy into our lives. God shows up with life and love in the middle of whatever else is happening in our lives.

With this mindset, I read today’s scripture lessons. For the season of Epiphany, the chosen readings are showing us how God

reveals God into our world and into human lives. These readings are about hearing, knowing and seeing God in a variety of circumstances. Samuel hears the voice of God, but needs the advice of the more experienced Eli to understand who it is and what it means. Paul rails at the Corinthians and reminds them that God is so close that their very bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit. In the Gospel, Philip and Nathanael encounter the Living Lord in the person of Jesus, who said to them and to us—**Follow me!**

Today, it is the Psalm that speaks to me of the presence of God in all my days. In modern language part of it reads:

*I'm an open book to you;  
even from a distance, you know what I'm thinking.  
You know when I leave and when I get back;  
I'm never out of your sight.  
You know everything I'm going to say  
before I start the first sentence.  
I look behind me and you're there,  
then up ahead and you're there, too—  
your reassuring presence, coming and going.  
This is too much, too wonderful—  
I can't take it all in! (msg)*

All Christians are called to a life in ongoing relationship with our God. This shows itself in the world through our holiness and our discipleship. We were baptized, and we continue living as children of God, part of the family of God, working toward the day when all will

be one and all will be well. We long for that ultimate comfort of the presence of God and, in the meantime, we seek to know God in the ways that we can here and now in this broken world. We are often distracted and lose our focus on following Jesus. We turn away and follow other things. We take care of other priorities.

When we are well and busy with the work of the world, it is very difficult to focus on God, to look and listen for those special signs that say God is active in the world. Just as Jesus promised Nathanael that he would see “*heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man*”, each of us is given signs of God’s presence and activity in our lives. The presence of God brings unexpected joy and understanding to events and circumstances throughout our lives. But, they are not always immediately recognizable as the hand of God.

Sometimes, it is only in those moments when we are quiet and reflecting on what has gone before and what is to come that we can see the fingerprints of God the events of our life or hear the whispering voice of the Spirit urging us on to something new. The truth is, it is often in those dark and quiet hours that God speaks to us most directly.

When I suffer from insomnia, I often begin talking to God, counting blessings or friends. One of the surest ways I've found of returning to peaceful sleep is to begin praying for the members of my family, working my way through the family tree, bringing the needs of each person before God and being thankful for their presence in my life. Not always, but sometimes, I come to a new understanding of how to reach out to one of those people and do God's work in the world for them. Other times, I think through the list of places I've lived or places I've worked, remembering God's care for me in each of those places. The message of Christmas – **God is with us**—and the message of Epiphany – **God is manifest in the world**—have left signs in my own life that I can sometimes only see in the dark of night looking backward.

Specialists on aging tell us that the older you are, the less you sleep at night. Nighttime, especially when you are sad or sick, can be a very lonely and scary time. It becomes ever more important to be able to learn to call upon God and recognize the signs of God's presence in the long hours of quiet darkness.

Eli recognized God in the night. Eli, the priest in the first reading, was very old and blind. His sons were carrying on the

family's priestly duties and the child, Samuel, served as a caregiving companion for Eli. Yet, it was Eli's privilege and obligation to interpret and recognize the sign of God's voice calling Samuel. It took great humility for Eli to send Samuel, still only a child, back to receive the message from God that he must have longed to hear himself. And, the words of God did not bring a happy message for Eli, yet he spoke the truth to Samuel and did all he could to accept the will of God and develop Samuel into a great prophet. The hand of God that night was on both Eli and Samuel and they both had a part to play in completing God's work for their time. Training children to see and hear God is the job of the people of God.

Psalm, 63, too, speaks of a longing for God, that desire for God's presence that is as real than hunger and thirst. King David is traditionally said to be the author of the Psalms. David's life is well-documented in scripture—from his childhood heroism to his battlefield victories and wise rule of the kingdom. We know of his less than honorable dealings with Bathsheba and Uriah; and, his difficulties with wives and children and neighbors. The first chapter of the first book of Kings tells the story of David's last days. **“King David was old and advanced in years; and although they covered him with**

**clothes, he could not get warm.”** I have an image of David, unable to get around so well any more, wrapped in warm blankets. So, I imagine King David, saying those words from our Psalm: **“When I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the night watches...my soul clings to you; your right hand holds me fast.”**

I picture David finding the comfort of the Almighty as he lives out his last days. Wrapped in his blanket, David still is receiving visitors; Nathan the prophet, his beloved wife Bathsheba, the priests Zadok and Benaniah, and his son, Solomon. As Eli had encouraged Samuel to follow the will of the Lord, so David encouraged young Solomon. Scripture says (1Kings 2:1-3) **When David’s time to die drew near, he charged his son Solomon, saying: “I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, be courageous, and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statues, his commandments, his ordinances and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn.”** The faith and understanding of the Lord that David had found through his long life and held onto through those long night watches, he passed onto his son.

God has called and loved and sustained all of us as disciples, part of God's family, responsible for reaching out, to other disciples and to those who do not know Jesus. We are called to speak and share especially with the next generation. Just as God called Samuel and Philip and Nathanael, he has called us. And, as Samuel prophesied, and Philip and Nathanael invited others; we are called to share our own stories of God's words. Listen to the interpretation of one preacher on our call:

*"It would be easy if God only called a select few and left the rest of us alone. But it's not that way. Oh, we can pretend we're not being called. We can ignore God, we can demand proof, we can bargain with Him, and we can ask our questions— "Give me a break God, I've got some other things I've got to get done; can't I just wait for a while?" But God is not going to stop. Christ is unrelenting—he wants all of us; he needs all of us.*

*God hopes to change the world. And He starts with the likes of Samuel and Andrew, and with the likes of the very ordinary person sitting next to you right now. The children and teens, who think they're too young for God to call them; the middle-aged and disappointed with their careers and forced to let-go of some lifelong*

*goals; the retired and the old, who only think that God calls the young. Christ has things in mind for us and Christ has always done his best work through the ordinary. And we can never stop listening—God wants to hear each of us answer, “Here I am Lord.”<sup>i</sup>*

God wants us to be in a deep relationship with Him all our days. God calls us to prayer and praise, whether in the day or deep in the night. Jesus himself prayed often. He prayed that we would be one with the Father as He and the Father were one. It is only through our deepening relationship with Jesus, through scripture and prayer, through Christ-like action that we grow closer to God. We are promised that our relationship with God will change us and will change the world around us. Today is the only day we have to live and love and serve. Let us pray:

Insistent God,  
by night and day you summon your slumbering people,  
So stir us with your voice  
and enlighten our lives with your grace  
that we give ourselves fully  
to Christ's call to mission and ministry.<sup>ii</sup> **Amen.**

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<sup>i</sup> **Rev. Mr. David J. Shea**  
**<http://www.mtsm.org/preaching/homilies.htm>**

<sup>ii</sup> <https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/prayers.php?id=61>