

## FIRST READING: 1 Samuel 3:1-10

*At a time when visions are rare and unexpected, the LORD comes to Samuel and calls him to speak the divine word. Though just a boy, Samuel responds to God obediently, as Eli the priest has taught him to respond. This marks the beginning of Samuel's prophetic ministry.*

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "**Here I am!**" <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup>

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." <sup>7</sup> Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "**Speak, for your servant is listening.**"

## SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

*Paul helps the Corinthians understand that God has claimed the entirety of their lives through the death of Christ. Hence Christian relationships and conduct, including areas of human sexuality, are to reflect the reality that we belong to Christ and that the Holy Spirit lives within us.*

<sup>12</sup> “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.** <sup>13</sup> “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. <sup>14</sup> And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. <sup>15</sup> 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! <sup>16</sup> 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.” <sup>17</sup> But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. <sup>18</sup> Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. <sup>19</sup> 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? <sup>20</sup> **For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.**

## **GOSPEL: John 1:43-51**

The holy gospel according to John.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

*In John’s gospel, Jesus’ ministry begins with the call of disciples, who then bring others to Jesus. Philip’s friend Nathanael moves from skepticism to faith when he accepts the invitation to “Come and see.”*

<sup>43</sup> The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, **“Follow me.”** <sup>44</sup> Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. <sup>45</sup> 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.” <sup>46</sup> Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” <sup>47</sup> When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, **“Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!”** <sup>48</sup> Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, **“I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.”** <sup>49</sup> Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” <sup>50</sup>

Jesus answered, **“Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.”** <sup>51</sup> 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**

*A couple were in a busy shopping center just before Christmas. The wife suddenly noticed that her husband was missing and as they had a lot to do, she called him on her phone. "Where are you?" the wife said. "You know we have lots to do." He replied, "Do you remember the jewelers we went into about 10 years ago, and you fell in love with that diamond necklace. I couldn't afford it at the time, and I said that one day I would get it for you?" The tears started to flow down her cheek, and she got all choked up. "Yes, I do remember that shop" she replied. "Well, I'm in the video game store next to that."*

Sometimes we only hear what we want to hear.

Now you know how much I like context in digging into a scripture passage. This week's gospel is no exception to that preference. So we're going to see what Philip was saying to his friend, Nathaniel. And we'll see what happened when he set aside his initial response and took a chance on a bigger story.

In the Gospel of John, we meet Nathanael, a friend of Philip, from Bethsaida. Nathaniel is first described as being skeptical about whether the Messiah could come from Nazareth, saying: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?", but he accepts Philip's invitation to "come and see."

Nazareth in Jesus' time was merely a little hamlet, a wide spot in the road. It was hard to believe that a heroic leader that had been anticipated for generations could come from such an insignificant little place. A preconceived notion inspired Nathaniel's doubt. His friend's faith inspired his willingness to take a look.

When Nathaniel met Jesus, Jesus immediately characterized him as "an Israelite in whom is no deceit". Scholars remind us the word used for deceit was used to describe

Jacob, the founder of the Jewish nation. You will recall that Jacob was a little shady at times, cheating his brother out of his inheritance and his father's blessing. And he did it all with deceit. The same scholars connect Jesus' words "you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" with Jacob's dream of the ladder that reached to heaven. You might say that with these images that Nathaniel would have known Jesus' was inviting him to a new expression of faith— Jesus' own "come and see." And just one more thing about the passage. Scholars tell us that Jesus' quote "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you", is based on a Jewish figure of speech, referring to studying the Torah. With that, Nathanael recognizes Jesus as "the Son of God" and "the King of Israel".

Come and see. An invitation to let your thoughts about something be enlarged. Come and see connects doubt and faith and allows us to see beyond the surface and catch Jesus at work.

How about pandemic? If we were invited to "come and see" do you think we might see Jesus at work in the midst of disruption and uncertainty? How would we respond if our neighbors were to ask "Can anything good come out of this pandemic?"

*We've learned what we value. The things that we cannot do exactly as we did them a year ago, we've found ways to engage them safely with consideration for those around us.*

*We've learned that some things are not as important. When we get to the end of this time, some things may not come back. And that's okay. They've served their purpose and we have new ways of connecting in community.*

How about a debilitating genetic disorder? How might we respond to the neighbor whose child has been diagnosed with something that cannot be cured? Can anything good come out of devastating news?

Ollie was a typical five-year-old. He was always on the move. And like any little growing boy, he often got ahead of his body, tripping on air and hitting walls when he ran around a corner. When Ollie was six, his doctor wanted to have some tests run. His vision wasn't as good as it should be, and combined with some other observations, the doctor suspected there may be more to the situation. When the results finally came back, the family had some doubts about God's love. Their only son had a rare genetic disorder that would soon take his vision, then his hearing and then leave him with debilitating seizures. His life expectancy would be barely past his teens.

Surrounded by a loving family and faith community, Ollie's parents and sisters moved through their doubt and held on to their faith. Ollie is fifteen today. And over the years he has taken his family deeper into care for others in the community. At eight, he heard the bells ringing outside stores at Christmas and convinced his parents to let him ring outside the store in their little town. Five thousand dollars later, he worked with a learning store in Omaha to buy toys that went all over the Midwest. By the way, the store matched his contribution. His care for others in the midst of his own reality touched many, many lives. In his short life, he has changed many people's thoughts about disability to expand as they heard his invitation to "come and see."

And how about storming the Capitol in Washington, D.C.? The event on Epiphany, January 6<sup>th</sup>, assaulted our senses and raised our doubts. What can we say about the actions of so many people who look like us and maybe even think like some of us? Can anything good come out of pent-up anger and frustration?

I am not endorsing the actions of the protesters turned rioters. Let me be clear about that. From a Christian perspective, violence is never the way of Jesus. Jesus builds, not destroys. At the same time, we have to get past our initial thoughts about how it happened and learn the why it happened. To attempt a simple answer would not do justice to those involved nor to those who witnessed it. We can, at a minimum, say there were people there who want to be sure their perspective on life in the United States today was heard. It's possible that some had more sinister motives, pushed to more

extreme action by an extended period of not being heard. This protest turned riot can be a call to “come and see” and address the justice issues so important in our faith. If we want to be heard and have the chance to share a different perspective with the crowd that stormed the Capitol, we have to recognize that Jesus welcomed Nathaniel who had just doubted and disrespected him. He found a way to recognize his place to the faith community and told him about it. Jesus’ willingness to interact with him meant Nathaniel got to “come and see” something different, too. As a result, they started working together.

Remember that joke at the beginning, when I said, sometimes we usually hear what we want to hear. We’re probably back at that point. Some of you will understand what I am saying. Others may initially be offended. But I think we’ve had an unexpected Epiphany on January 6<sup>th</sup>. We’ve seen disparities in who can share their concerns. But as followers of Jesus Christ, we are baptized into a community that has committed itself to work for peace and justice in all the earth. That’s part of our baptism and confirmation promises.

So, I have to ask you, how do we accept God’s invitation to “come and see” the issues behind the Black Lives Matter movement? Can anything good come out of this movement that will improve life for others?

I don’t know about you, but I was raised in a home where some people were objectified and reduced to a limited number of qualities, few of them positive. I heard vocabulary – and repeated some of it – until I learned to see people from God’s perspective. I went to schools that were minimally multi-racial. I don’t think I ever had a black teacher until I got to college. My life has been pretty isolated. Yet God has blessed me with a few friends of color who love me for who I am and help me understand life from a different perspective—theirs. Some of my white friends help me remember Jesus welcomed Gentiles and tax collectors (I’m not so sure about that last one). He lifted up the despised Samaritans in his parables. He healed people outside his own group—and even died on the cross for the whole world which God so dearly loved.

Maybe we're all in the video game store, next to the place where the One who loves us most wants us to meet us because we have a lot to do. Maybe this week, we'll hear someone say "come and see" and we'll have a new and significant experience of Jesus, the messiah, the savior of the whole world.