

Weekend of Sunday, January 17, 2021
2nd Sunday after Epiphany/Lectionary 2/Proper X/Year B
First Reading: 1 Samuel 3:1-10[11-20]
Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20
Gospel Reading: John 1:43-51
Sermon Title: “Who Will You Follow”

Theme

n 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.”

Text

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” ⁴⁴Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵Philip 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.” ⁴⁶Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” ⁴⁷When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!”

⁴⁸Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” ⁴⁹Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” ⁵⁰Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” ⁵¹And 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.”

¹Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

²At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³the 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. ⁴Then the LORD called, “Samuel! Samuel!” and he said, “Here I am!” ⁵and 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. ⁶The 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.” ⁷Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸The 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. ⁹Therefore 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.

¹⁰Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

Sermon

First a disclaimer: What you are about to hear me say is not intended to be political. However, even as I say that I anticipate some saying, "I'll be the judge of that!" In the last year, I have been admonished for some of the illustrations I have used in sermons for crossing the line of being political. I like to think that has more to say about the hearer than the speaker. While I acknowledge that anything, perhaps everything, can be considered political, know in advance that I intend to adhere to the teachings of scripture as I challenge all of us to ponder the question, "Who will you follow?"

In the First Reading, we have the story of God's first revelation to the young child, Samuel. You heard it yourself, in summary, let me say that God apparently revealed God's self to the child, Samuel in an audible human voice. I say "apparently" because that is often *not* the case. Personally, there have been moments of *theophany* in my life, manifestations of the Holy, and at least twice, I heard it as clear as a human voice, but I am sure there was no audible voice, I just perceived it that way.

Now you may ask, "Only twice, pastor?" to which I respond, I as your pastor, am not that much different than you are. The noise of life often drowns out the still small voice of God (1 Kings 19:12). Being able to discern the voice of God is a spiritual discipline that takes a lot of work, it's not hard work, but it is continual work. And this gets right to my point. In these present days, "Who will you follow?"

If I watch the news on one network I will be influenced by their bias. If I watch the news on another network, they may have a different spin on the same story. If I listen to family or friends I respect who have an opinion about an issue, I will be influenced by them. What influences *your* daily life, your interpersonal relationships, your conversations, and interactions? The answers to these questions will likely feed into how *you* react to other people and situations.

I am not a fan of Facebook, and that is because I have never really given it a good try. And the reason I've never really given it a good try is that when I've spent time looking through it, I am surprised and sometimes embarrassed at what people post. It is as if Facebook posters don't realize what they post is *out there* for the whole

world to see. I won't, but I could give you examples of what some people whom I call friends have posted, that causes me to want to unfriend them.

I think what is happening to us is that in our society there is a constant salvo of information coming at us, and with all the social media platforms available, we feel the need to respond to it all – sometimes without thinking before we post. I know me pretty well, and I know I am capable of being wrong and inappropriate and hurtful even if I don't intend to be. So I tend to be less social, regarding social media.

I know of a couple of people who have recently told me that they have unfriended some of their friends because of their posts that seemed to them to be scandalous, provocative, conspiratorial, or in their words, just plain crazy! The subjects include the COVID-19 virus, the related isolation, curfew and mask-wearing, the election, the activity at the Capital, and the President, and on and on. Please note that I have tried to walk the tightrope on not presenting a side.

Back to my question that is my sermon title, "Who will you follow?" Are you metaphorically drinking from the firehose of our society, or are you drinking from the still waters (Psalm 23:2) of our LORD? There is a choice. The disciple of the Lord Jesus will make the right decision, and it takes work.

Again, back to the First Reading, Samuel was just a child. How could he have known unless he was taught? Had the reading gone on, we would have learned that Samuel was like the altar boy to Eli the priest. What we only learn about Eli the priest from further study is that Eli was an unfaithful priest that allowed ungodly behavior to happen among his family and his administration as a priest, which allowed the people of God for whom he ministered to wander spiritually. But to know that takes more than reading only what is before us.

I would not be surprised to learn that some never gave it a thought that God has something to say about the goings-on of our day. It never occurred to them. Do you ask? The child Samuel didn't understand what was going on, but he sought answers. Do you? And not from the news media or social media, but from the LORD. A few verses later, we find this passage:

3:19 As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. **20** And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the LORD.

Are words like that said about you? Do you desire that words like that are said about you?

Moving on to the Gospel Reading, we have John's version of the very beginning of Jesus' calling of his disciples. It's the first place, according to John, that Philip is mentioned. We don't know if he witnessed the baptism of Jesus a few days before, or whether he witnessed John the Baptizer publicly declaring that Jesus was the "Lamb of God" (:36), or whether Philip knew John and Simon Peter, the first two disciples called, according to John.

All we know is that Philip had an encounter with Jesus and that was enough for him. Philip found Nathanael and said, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." At least at that moment, Philip knew the source of all godly knowledge. He would accept Jesus' call and devote his life to learning from him and imitating his life. Let me posit for you that Philip knew the answer to my question, "Who will you follow?"

Maybe you find yourselves asking:

- What am I to believe?
- Who am I to believe?
- Who am I to trust?
- What is the truth?
- How can I know the truth?

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

Listen to me carefully, because this is not spiritual pabulum, we *can* know the only truth that matters if we but accept the call to discipleship, and do the work of a disciple. The Lord loves us, and wants what is best for us, and will not frustrate us - if we seek him.

This is not a political statement, it is the Gospel of the Lord. Let us pray about it.

Prayer

Lord God, the day in which we live is so complicated that it is often difficult to know which way to turn. And if we were honest, turning toward you doesn't often occur to us. Send us your Spirit to guide us in the way we should go. Inspire us to desire to know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly, day by day. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen

Now, I will have more to say about this in the next couple of weeks.

Next week, the weekend of January 24th, in a sermon I have entitled, "Jonah or Jesus," I will challenge us to think about two models of living and ask us to choose one as our example of faithful and godly living.

And the following weekend, the weekend of January 31st, in a sermon I have entitled, "Trifling," I will challenge our thinking that everything that comes at us is worthy of our faithful and godly life of discipleship. I hope you will be back to listen and learn.