

# Scripture Readings and Sermon

*January 17, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin*

## **Commentary on 1 Samuel 3:1-10** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The institution becoming an obstacle to God's grace is not new with the "Spiritual but not Religious". Jesus dealt with those who put the Law above grace and even in the time of Samuel, those who were so called prophets were unable to see God. The opening lines of this section point to the fact that Eli and his sons had lost favor with God and the people. Before this passage, the people were complaining that Eli's sons were abusing their power. Eli himself is described as having "dim" vision physically but also spiritually. This "dim" vision is more poignant when we consider that Eli was with the ark and the lamp of God. At this time, the ark is in a house or "temple" in Shiloh. We know it is a building because when Hannah goes to receive a blessing (1 Samuel 1:9), Eli is at the "doorpost". Eli and Samuel were sleeping in the house when God called. Eli, who was the priest, was unable to "hear" God once again indicating his distance from God. Like Isaiah's call, Samuel is called to give a word of judgment to Eli. That judgment would be fulfilled when in the next chapter the ark is taken and Eli dies.

1 Samuel 3:9 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'

How do prepare to listen to the LORD?

Do you light a candle, meditate, or sit out in nature?

Do we say we are listening while we are actually doing something else?

Has someone ever done that to you? How did you feel?

How can you improve the way you listen to God?

## **Commentary on John 1:43-51** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

In John, Jesus is the hidden mystery that needs to be pointed out. The voice of God revealed Jesus to John the Baptist and John pointed out Jesus to John's disciples. After Jesus called Philip, one of the disciples of John, Philip went to Nathanael to point out Jesus. As the news spreads beyond the miraculous event of the baptism, however, people become more resistant to accepting Jesus as the mystery revealed. In the face of Nathanael's doubt, Philip simply challenges Nathanael to "Come and See". All doubt is removed by the simple statement "I saw you under the fig tree". This could refer to the rabbinic advice to study the Law "under the vine and fig tree". It could also refer to Zechariah 3:8-10 which refers to "my servant the Branch" and "you shall invite each other to come under your vine and fig tree." This could have been what Nathanael was studying when Philip came to him or he could have been studying Jacob's dream. This would explain Jesus' reference to the "heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

John 1:46 "Come and see."

Have you ever dismissed someone or something because you assumed?

Did actually experiencing it change your mind?

Do we close our minds in worship because we've heard that scripture before?

How can you make each encounter with God your first encounter?

Is it time to "Come and See"?

## **Commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:12-20** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

In Chapter 5, Paul indicates that one of the reasons for division within the Body of Christ is rooted in immorality. Using the example of sexual immorality (5:1), Paul calls the Body of believers to a higher standard and that if individuals will not hold to that standard they must be removed for the

sake of the Body. This should not be a matter for the legal system, Paul argues at the beginning of Chapter 6 but rather the Holy Spirit removes and sanctifies the Body from immorality. Continuing this focus on the Holy Spirit and immorality in this reading. Since sexual immorality begins with a perversion of intent, it is rooted in the heart and therefore the most destructive. The heart is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. To corrupt the heart is to distort the purity of God's love and love of our neighbor. Rather than sacrificial love (you were bought at a price), sexual immorality is self/flesh gratifying love that seeks its own pleasure and reward. By joining with those who seek gratification in this way, the believer moves away from the Lord. Paul will then take up this sacrificial love in the context of marriage in Chapter 7.

1 Corinthians 6:19 "do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you"  
Do you know people who think God is only at church?  
What does it mean to you that God is always in your heart?  
Does it change how you act or what you say? Should it?  
What would it be like to have Jesus follow you throughout your day?

### Sermon "**Listening for the Call**" (*[Sermon Video](#)*)

On this Sunday after the Baptism of the Lord, the scripture readings focus on Jesus calling the disciples. As Christians, we believe that Christ is always calling us to leave our nets and follow him. The question is not whether Christ is calling but rather if we are listening. Through today's scriptures, we will ponder three reasons we may not be listening.

The first reason we may not be listening is because our ears are filled with too many other voices and distractions. For the church in Corinth, a vibrant port city, prostitution was one of the major "distractions" facing members of the young church. Paul places prostitution in the category of those sins which dominate us. While fornication is the obsession with gratification through sexual activity, there are other addictions which can dominate and enslave us. When any method of handling stress becomes an obsession that dominates our lives, it falls into the same category Paul is addressing. These obsessions crowd our hearts so there is no room for the Holy Spirit and control our bodies so that we can no longer totally give them to the Lord. These sins block our ears from hearing Jesus' call to leave those obsessions and distractions and follow our Lord.

The second reason some do not hear the call is that, like Samuel, they have never heard the word of the Lord. While people may be familiar with the political stance of some religious groups or biblical stories that were made into movies, a personal encounter with the living Savior is growing rare. Spirituality is no longer simply associated with a relationship with God through Christ but rather reflects a "new age" approach to meditation and self-help techniques. As in the day of Samuel, "The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread." The Lord may be calling but his voice may be confused with a restless spirit or a need for something more but a lack of knowing what "something more" might be. Like Samuel, people are running to people who have "poor" eyesight seeking knowledge because they believe the "church" is either corrupt or irrelevant.

Finally, the reason many even inside the church fail to hear Christ's call is because we assume we already know. Nathanael assumed that nothing good could come out of Nazareth. If he had let that assumption prevent him from following Philip to Jesus, he would never find the one he had been waiting for. A knowledge of scripture and a lifetime going to church does not mean that we know the mind of God or who God will use as the messenger of God's calling. Jesus may be heard in worship or at work. Jesus can be encountered in the preacher or the homeless person under the bridge. Jesus may call us to the Food Pantry or to quality time with our friends and children. Walking with Jesus means walking *with* Jesus and not running ahead or staying behind. We must always be listening so that we can navigate the turns of life and discover the wonders of God.

Whether it is because it has been a long time since you have heard God or life has become too distracting or you have fallen into a spiritual rut of assumptions, it is time to wake up and listen for Jesus is calling. Are you ready to hear his call today?