

Epiphany 2

January 17, 2021 (Year B)



“Let the man who would hear God speak,
read Holy Scripture.”

– Martin Luther –

(Spoken in 1545, the year before he died.)

PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

1 Samuel 3:1–10 (11–20)

In the third chapter of 1 Samuel we hear that, “the word of the Lord was rare in those days” (v. 1). Visions were infrequent, communication was severely limited between God and his chosen people. The author also mentions that the prophet Eli’s eyes had begun to fail him, but that the lamp of God had not yet gone out.

- Do you suppose Eli’s ability to listen for God was going the way of his eyesight? How else did Eli misinterpret human and divine cues? (See 1 Samuel 1:13–14)
- From the context of this passage, was the issue that, a) no one was listening for the Lord’s voice, b) God had nothing to say, or, c) there was no one called to speak for God?
- What does the “lamp of God” represent in this story? Does God still speak to his people today? If so, in what ways?

Into this context of failing communication, God calls out the name of a young boy named Samuel. Samuel hears the voice but doesn’t know who is talking to him. Interestingly, it is Eli who finally identifies the source of the voice.

- Why do you suppose it took Eli so long to recognize the voice of God? Why didn’t Samuel know whose voice was speaking?
- How is it that we are often able to recognize God at work in other people’s lives, but don’t see it in our own?

This text raises the question of how we understand the call of God in our lives. We often speak of the clergy having a “call” to ministry; but notice in this story, it was not the priest Eli who was called, but a little servant boy.

- In what sense are all God’s people called to ministry — both clergy and laity? How have you experienced that call?
- Is a “call” something that we determine for ourselves? How do we miss or even misuse God’s call in our lives?
- What does v. 19 mean when it says that God let none of Samuel’s words fall to the ground? How does God use our words?

Psalms 139:1–10

The psalmist gave praise to God and spoke of the awe of God’s intimate knowledge of his thoughts and being. Before a word is formed on our tongue, God knows what we are about to say. No matter where we go, God is with us. He knows where we are at all times — both physically and spiritually.

- Where are some of the spiritual or emotional “places” we may wander? Why is it important to know that there is nowhere we can go — mentally or physically — where God cannot find us?
- How does this Psalm relate to what Jesus says about himself as

the shepherd and we as his lost sheep? (Luke 15)

Have you ever thought about what it means to really **know** someone? It takes a great amount of time and attention to know the ways of another person — their habits, likes and dislikes, struggles, and thoughts. The psalmist acknowledged that God has examined him fully and completely and is aware of all his human ways.

- A pagan Greek proverb says: “Happy are they whom the gods ignore.” Why would people feel that way? What would it be like if God were unaware of things going on in our lives?

1 Corinthians 6:12–20

St. Paul pointed out that while things might be lawful, it doesn’t necessarily mean that they are helpful. Some things never change, as we struggle with ideas, morals, and values in our society. Just because something is legal does not make it right, acceptable, or beneficial.

- What sorts of things can you think of that are legal but not helpful? Should everything unhelpful be illegal?

The word Paul used here for “helpful” is *sumphero* in the Greek. It is a verb that means to “bear together” — in the sense of sharing a load. Paul was concerned with the communal aspect of human behavior which always has an effect on those we are connected to.

- When might concern for others make us avoid doing something we might legitimately have a right to do? Can you give any examples?

In verse 19, Paul urges us to consider our bodies as temples of the Lord. The temple was the holiest place in Israel, the place where God resided in the holy of holies.

- What does it mean to say that our bodies are a temple of God?

John 1:43–51

Nathanael seems to have been a natural cynic — the kind of person who “tells it like he sees it.” Apparently, he did not expect much of a person from the back-water town of Nazareth, or the claims made about Rabbi Jesus.

- In what sense does our cynical culture often have a similar lack of enthusiasm for the message of Jesus? Given the cynicism of the world, how are we to introduce Jesus to people?
- Why was Nathanael surprised that Jesus “knew” him as they spoke for the first time? What do you think he meant?
- How did Nathanael hear about Jesus in the first place? In what sense was Philip used as God’s instrument to bring Christ into the life of his friend?