

Readings for the Second Sunday after Epiphany

14th January 2024

First Reading: 1 Samuel 3:1-10

The boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; 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. Then the LORD called, 'Samuel! Samuel!' and he said, 'Here I am!' 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. 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.'

Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. 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. 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.

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

Brothers and sisters, "All things are permitted for me," but not all things are beneficial. "All things are permitted for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. "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. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. 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! 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." But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body, but the fornicator sins against the body itself. 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? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

Gospel: St John 1:43-51

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.' Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 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.' Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.'

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!' Nathanael asked him, 'Where did you come to know me?' Jesus answered, 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip

called you.' Nathanael replied, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Jesus answered, 'Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.' 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.'

A Reflection for the Second Sunday after Epiphany

From Rev'd David Higgon

Jesus in his parables speaks a lot about finding things, of finding lost sheep, of finding great treasures and pearls of great value. Today in our reading we are told that Jesus found Philip, and that Philip found Nathanael and told him that in Jesus he had in turn found the one Moses wrote about in the law. It is Jesus who initiates the finding, and it sets off a chain reaction that results in the invitation to come and see what was good in this man from Nazareth. Jesus says of Nathanael, 'here there is a true Israelite in whom there is nothing false, and he tells him he had seen him under the fig tree. In this context Jesus is not saying he saw him in a public place sitting under a fig tree but rather Jesus had seen him in the privacy of his own home, the fig tree being in John's Gospel a metaphor for home, a place of meditation, prayer and study.

We often concern ourselves with what are important questions of how can we find God or how can we experience peace on earth? But as important as these questions are, it is more important to remember the ancient question - "Why?"

In this season of Epiphany, we are reminded of why Christ came to earth, why he was born as a helpless baby in a manger, and why his whole life was lived as an outcast from the best society. Only when we ask the question of why Christ came to earth then can we begin to answer the question "how?" – how can we find God again; how can we experience peace on earth?

Why was it necessary for Christ to come to earth and even why was it necessary for Jesus to find Philip?

God has come to us because we, by our own conscious efforts, by our own emotions, can never redeem ourselves or the world, or regain communion with God. No ladder of mysticism can ever meet, or find, or possess God. Faith is a power given to us. It is never simply our ability or strength of will to believe. The spiritual experience that is truly genuine is given to us by God in the coming of his Spirit, and only as we surrender our whole lives to an active expression of his will.

To put it simply, spiritual experience, whether it be of faith, hope or love, is something we cannot manufacture, but which we can only receive. If we direct our lives to seeking it for ourselves, we shall lose it, but if we lose our lives by living out the daily way of Christ, we shall find it.

Epiphany, the coming of the wise men, is a story of surrender and obedience to God's will. The most striking revelation of this is found in the conception and birth of Jesus. When the angel Gabriel came to Mary, he told her, "The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you." And she answered, "Behold the handmaiden of the Lord; be it unto me according to your word."

It was in this submission, this surrender and obedience, that Christ was conceived. And it is the laying down of power that is revealed in his birth. He came to us as a child. He was not even born in the protection of a royal court, with soldiers to guard against intruders and physicians to guard against sickness. Rather, he was born in a cold dirty stable, at the mercy of Herod, who was alerted to his presence by the wise men.

It was in the surrender of herself to God that Mary became the mother of Christ. It was in her acceptance of Gabriel's message that the great decisive event of history took place.

In our Gospel reading, when Jesus reveals that he had seen Nathanael under the fig tree, Nathanael is so impressed that he calls Jesus the Son of God and acknowledges him as king, and in doing so he is submitting and surrendering himself to Jesus as lord.

And in our own daily lives, what is important is that we accept and live by and surrender ourselves to a strength which is not our own, and that is the light of God's love.

When we experience this love we turn away from the notion that we, by our own conscious efforts, can set something in motion. It is not that we, as pilgrims, climb to a celestial city, but that the Christ Child is born in the poverty of our hearts. Surrender does not mean the cessation of seeking, for we must always seek the will of God in every situation, when we see and hear the earth and its people cry out in despair, we must seek to do the will of God. We seek in order to obey. And in obeying the small thing that we see, the greater is revealed to us. True surrender never separates itself from carrying out God's will.

We do not come to know God through our own conscious spiritual efforts or through striving for a state of spiritual perfection. No, God comes to us when we offer a cup of water to the thirsty, whether it be plain water in an enamel cup or the water of life found in God's Word.

But let us not be deceived. Human goodwill and love cannot redeem. If it could there have been no need for God to be born as a human child on this earth. What we celebrate in Epiphany is the coming down of God's love and the revelation of God's love. When the wise men came from the East, they made a grave mistake, they went to Jerusalem, the capital, to inquire, "Where is he who has been born King of the Jews?" and the outcome was the slaughter of the innocent of Bethlehem. Today those who are "wise" make the same mistake in looking to worldly power to solve the world's problems. It is only God's love that can effect a transformation of the world. Those of us who mourn the futility of our own efforts, receive the comfort of the love of God. Those who are meekly obedient to his will are filled by the love of God, not as a prize to be won after death, but as redeemed life for this earth.

The peace on earth the angels proclaimed is reconciliation with God. It is brought about by the coming of Christ into our poverty. In John's words, 'This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us'.