

The Second Sunday after Epiphany – Year B, RCL January 14, 2018

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

John 1:43-51

A sermon preached by the Rev. Susan Pinkerton
Rector, St. John's, West Hartford, CT

God's Invitation into the Holy

I spent last week with my daughter, Beth, and her family in California (no, I will spare sharing with you the temperatures of Southern California.) My daughter shared the delightful but somewhat unexpected moment they had on Christmas Eve at their church with my 2 ½ year old granddaughter, Liza. At one point before the service St. Nicholas shows up with a bag full of candy canes he is handing out to the children. My energetic granddaughter sees this and, one not about to be left out, she runs up to St. Nicholas with both arms outstretched and yells at the top of her lungs for all to hear, “trick or treat!” Things are not always what they seem.

We see this in our reading from the Hebrew Bible when God repeatedly calls out to young Samuel during the night. However, Samuel assumes the voice he hears must be his elderly teacher and mentor, Eli. Little does Samuel know that this is the beginning of God's call to him to become one of the greatest prophets of ancient Israel. In time Samuel will be the one who anoints David as King. Again, things are not always what they seem.

Last week we heard how John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the River Jordan. The Spirit descended upon Jesus's head just as he came up out of the water, while droplets of water were running off his dark, wet hair. This was Jesus' holy anointing as he began his public ministry of spreading the Good News; that the Savior of the world has come to dwell among us.

A few verses before today's reading Jesus calls two brothers, Andrew and Simon (who he renames Cephas, Peter), to follow him. Then Philip, neighbors of Andrew and Simon, comes along and out of nowhere Jesus calls out and says, “follow me.” He is almost beside himself as he perceives that Jesus is truly God's Son, the One they have been waiting for generations upon generations. Philip turns to his good buddy, Nathanael, and excitedly tells him all about this rabbi from Nazareth. He is underwhelmed and not the least bit impressed, thinking what a Podunk town Nazareth is. He curtly responds, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Before, he can even remove the smirk off his face, Jesus sees Nathanael and calls out to him. It seems Jesus knows Nathanael better than he knows himself. With Jesus' recognition, comes Nathanael's sudden understanding of who Jesus is – this no-name rabbi from Nazareth is truly the Messiah, God's Son. Things are not always what they seem.

Fortunately, God is patient and works through our misguided assumptions and human limitations to reveal the Truth and the Light. This is the essence of Epiphany; celebrating the light of Christ coming into the world and into our very lives in a most personal and powerful way. Epiphany is a holy invitation to open our hearts and let God's love in. The question is dare we accept to God's invitation to follow me. If we say yes, we cannot help but be changed. Infused with God's transforming love we see the world differently. We become part of God's dream for the world as we embrace and live into our true identity as a child of God. Each of us begins this journey at our baptism, when we are sealed by Holy Spirit of baptism and marked as Christ's own forever. We continue this ancient rite of initiation as we welcome Harper Rose as the newest member of the household of God.

Tomorrow, we honor the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a young, black Baptist minister from the south who answered Jesus' call to follow him. As a consequence, King was jailed, harassed and his life threatened numerous times. In time he would become a world leader, Nobel Peace Prize recipient, prophet and saint, calling our nation and the world to be better than we are. Things are not always what they seem.

King was much like John the Baptist in that he spent his life pointing beyond himself, inviting and challenging us to envision and embrace the world God dreamed of; a world where peace, freedom and justice is the norm, not the exception; a world where racism, poverty and senseless violence is a thing of the past; and, a world where we all gather together as brothers and sisters in Christ, to "do justice, seek kindness, love peace and build community."¹ Now more than ever we need to hear King's prophetic voice as we strive to follow Christ, knowing that when we fall short, and we will, we are assured of God's mercy and saving Grace.

The night before he was killed by an assassin's bullet, King gave what would be his last sermon in Memphis, where he had gone to support a garbage collector's strike. King's life exemplified his faith and resolve to follow Jesus to the very end.

Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not

¹ J. Bennett Guess, author of a liturgy to celebrate Martin Luther King's Day, <http://www.ucc.org/assets/pdfs/09-Bending-Towards.pdf>, last accessed on Jan. 13, 2018.

fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.²

Amen.

² <http://www.afscme.org/union/history/mlk/ive-been-to-the-mountaintop-by-dr-martin-luther-king-jr>