

St. Paul's Episcopal Church
Sunday, January 14, 2024
Year B Epiphany 2

1 Samuel 3.1-10 (11-20); Psalm 139.1-5, 12-17; 1 Corinthians 6.12-20; John 1.43-51

“There is a magnet in a seeker’s heart whose true north is God. It bends toward the Voice of God with the ear of the heart and, like sunflowers in the sun, turns all of life toward the living of the word.

This listening is pure of pride and free of arrogance. It seeks wisdom-everywhere, at all times- and knows wisdom by the way it echoes the call of the scriptures.

The compass of God implanted in the seeker’s heart stretches toward truth and signals the way to justice.

A truly listening heart knows that we lose the chance for truth if we give another – any other – either too much or too little, control over the conscience that is meant to be ours alone.

And yet, at the same time, mutual obedience, real listening, holy listening forever seeks the spiritual dialogue holy wisdom demands.

This listening with the heart to the insights of another is not the obedience of children, or soldiers, or servants, or minions. It is the obedience given to a lover because of love alone.”

So says, Joan Chittister in her book *The Monastery of the heart, An Invitation to a Meaningful Life.*¹

What a beautiful “overlay” of today’s chosen scripture.

Samuel, under the tutorship of the prophet Eli thought that when God spoke to him, it was Eli speaking. Samuel was set straight by Eli and learned to hear the voice of God. Samuel heard and obeyed and lived into being the Prophet who served the King Saul, and had such a strong presence in the life of King David.

Nathaniel, after proclaiming his prejudice to Philip’s invitation to “come and see”, heard the voice of God when Jesus spoke. And thus, Nathaniel (whom we now know as Bartholomew) became a disciple.

“Follow me” Jesus said to Phillip.

“We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth.” In other words we have found our true north as Sister Joan writes.

Nathaniel doubts, yet Philip continues to invite. Nathaniel continues to doubt and then, hearing Jesus, turned and became a believer. (Oh, by the way, Nathaniel became the disciple we know as Bartholomew.)

Nathaniel changed his mind.

¹ Chittister, Joan from weekly e-newsletter, Bennetvision, Erie, PA 1/2012

Changed his mind about Jesus.

I read somewhere this week that simply “to change one’s mind” is another way of defining repentance or to turn around.

We are shown that, in Jesus, even doubters are given an unlimited number of opportunities to change their minds. Even after many doubts, the door always remains open.

As we, personally, consider our relationship with Jesus, and how we follow him, we are, every day called into a closer relationship with him. We are called on daily to make choices and opportunities to “change our minds” as we move forward.

I learned this week in the newly-formed Artist’s Way series that failures are to be applauded ... like the father of the prodigal son rejoicing at his return. Failures are stepping stones rather than stumbling blocks. They can help us learn, grow and mature in our faith or they can shackle us and make us prisoners of our own self-doubt.

Nathaniel’s declaration was one of joy, surprise to himself and to those around him, no doubt.

Whenever I hear the words “follow me” it warms my heart and takes me back to my own call to become a priest. What a startling thing to hear that this is what God was calling for me to be a priest. It was numbing, overwhelming, exciting and scary. I suspect this is par to what Nathaniel felt in his declaration, “Rabbi, you are the son of God! You are the king of Israel!”

“Follow me.”

How do you hear those words this morning? What are they saying to you? How will they motivate you to into a deeper relationship with yourself as you discover what more there is to learn. How will this change your relationship with God, through Jesus and the movement of the Holy Spirit? How will it transform you to invite others into this potential new and joyful state?

Last week, we renewed our baptismal vows.

This week’s message is intended to help solidify for you to remember what it is that you vowed for the future. How will you “change your mind” this week to intensify your walk ... your search for the north star and then invite others to join you on the journey?

Perhaps you might consider one or more of the following:

1. Create a Rule of Life if you do not already have one. *This is the practice of intentional daily prayer, study and discernment with God as your companion Christ-like commitment to a discipline that is transformative and leads to service to others in behalf of our creator. It is an ordering of your life based on Benedictine disciplines.*

2. As we journey toward Lent in a couple of weeks, commit yourselves to the Lenten Soup Suppers to help strengthen and affirm others, not only yourselves, along the way.
3. As part of your discipline, commit yourselves to one of the many ministries available to you here at St. Paul's as a physical discipline to help expand your awareness of what it means to be Christ in the world.
4. Invite a friend or two or three to the upcoming showing of "A Case for Love", a movie based on the mission and ministry of our own Presiding Bishop, Michael Bruce Curry.
5. Pray. Pray throughout the day for an awareness of the God-ness (or goodness) within you that it be illuminated and become the Epiphany to help you find your gifts.
6. And when you are comfortable enough to do so, be the Epiphany "aha" moment for those you may encounter this week and always. Help lead others to that north star.

Anne Matthew-Younes of Metropolitan Memorial United Methodist Church in Washington DC suggests, "Following Jesus changes everything. It does not matter where we have come from; it only matters where we are going. We accept the invitation to 'come and see.' See what came out of Nazareth, the place where Jesus began his healing ministry."²

Let us pray in the paraphrased prayer found in the *Forward Day by Day*:

We will try this day to live a simple, sincere, and serene life, repelling every thought of discontent, anxiety, discouragement, impurity, and self-seeking; cultivating cheerfulness, magnanimity, charity and the habit of holy silence; exercising economy in expenditure, generosity in giving, carefulness in conversation, diligence in appointed service, fidelity to every trust, and a childlike faith in God.

In particular, we will try to be faithful in those habits of prayer, work, study, physical exercise, eating, and sleep, which we believe the Holy Spirit has shown to be right.

And, as we cannot in our own strength do this, nor even with a hope of success, attempt it, we look to thee, God, to Jesus our Savior, and ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

² Matthew-Younes, Anne, President of E. Stanley Jones Foundation, Metropolitan Memorial United Methodist Church, Washington, DC., meditation for Saturday, January 13, 2018