

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY
JANUARY 14, 2024



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***CALL TO WORSHIP: (INSPIRED BY PSALM 139)**

One: We praise you, O God, for you are our God, and we are your people.

Many: Wonderful are your works, O God, we know them very well!

One: Search us and know us, Creator, remove us from shadows into your presence.

Many: Wonderful are your works, O God, we know them very well!

One: Place your hand upon us, Gracious One, as we worship you and minister in your name.

Many: Wonderful are your works, O God, we know them very well!

***INVOCATION:**

Sovereign One, we acknowledge your presence among us. Stir up the gifts you have planted among us. Hold us in your care and present a mirror before us so that we may know ourselves as you have known us. Strengthen us in your mercy and let your grace propel us to renewal and righteousness. Lift us so that might arise in spirit and in truth for your glory. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: "He Leadeth Me"**

***INVITATION TO CONFESSION:** We can hide nothing from God, who knows our every thought. God is aware of sins we have not recognized. Whenever we have broken a solemn trust, whenever we have acted on selfish impulse, whenever we have trampled the feelings of others or ignored their need, God has noticed. We cannot be right with God unless we examine ourselves and repent.

***UNISON PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**

Holy God, 1 Corinthians 6:12 reminds us that “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything. You have created us in your holy and divine image. We pray to reflect your goodness in the world. We confess that we have engaged in actions and attitudes contrary to your kingdom, and we ask for wisdom, guidance, and fortitude to be the people you have called us to be. Amen.

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

Beloved creation of God, the Holy One knows you fully, completely, and affirmative from the secret places of your innermost parts. Receive the knowing as a gift of assurance that God’s grace is sufficient for new life. God will abide with us as we strive to follow the way of Jesus Christ.

***GLORIA:**

Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here. (repeat two more times.) (end) One God always here. One God always here.

**SCRIPTURE LESSONS: 1 Samuel 3:1-20
Samuel’s call**

3 Now the boy Samuel was serving the LORD under Eli. The LORD’s word was rare at that time, and visions weren’t widely known. ² One day Eli, whose eyes had grown so weak he was unable to see, was lying down in his room. ³ God’s lamp hadn’t gone out yet, and Samuel was lying down in the LORD’s temple, where God’s chest was.

⁴ The LORD called to Samuel. “I’m here,” he said.

⁵ Samuel hurried to Eli and said, “I’m here. You called me?” “I didn’t call you,” Eli replied. “Go lie down.” So he did.

⁶ Again the LORD called Samuel, so Samuel got up, went to Eli, and said, “I’m here. You called me?”

“I didn’t call, my son,” Eli replied. “Go and lie down.”

⁷ Now Samuel didn’t yet know the LORD, and the LORD’s word hadn’t yet been revealed to him.

⁸ A third time the LORD called Samuel. He got up, went to Eli, and said, “I’m here. You called me?”

Then Eli realized that it was the LORD who was calling the boy. ⁹ So Eli said to Samuel, “Go and lie down. If he calls you, say, ‘Speak, LORD. Your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down where he’d been.

¹⁰ Then the LORD came and stood there, calling just as before, “Samuel, Samuel!”

Samuel said, “Speak. Your servant is listening.”

¹¹ The LORD said to Samuel, “I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of all who hear it tingle! ¹² On that day, I will bring to pass

against Eli everything I said about his household— every last bit of it! ¹³ I told him that I would punish his family forever because of the wrongdoing he knew about—how his sons were cursing God, but he wouldn't stop them. ¹⁴ Because of that I swore about Eli's household that his family's wrongdoing will never be reconciled by sacrifice or by offering."

¹⁵ Samuel lay there until morning, then opened the doors of the LORD's house. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. ¹⁶ But Eli called Samuel, saying:

"Samuel, my son!" "I'm here," Samuel said.

¹⁷ "What did he say to you?" Eli asked. "Don't hide anything from me. May God deal harshly with you and worse still if you hide from me a single word from everything he said to you." ¹⁸ So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him.

"He is the LORD," Eli said. "He will do as he pleases."

¹⁹ So Samuel grew up, and the LORD was with him, not allowing any of his words to fail. ²⁰ All Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was trustworthy as the LORD's prophet.

EPISTLE LESSON: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Avoid sexual immorality

¹² I have the freedom to do anything, but not everything is helpful. I have the freedom to do anything, but I won't be controlled by anything. ¹³ Food is for the stomach and the stomach

is for food, and yet God will do away with both. The body isn't for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. ¹⁴ God has raised the Lord and will raise us through his power. ¹⁵ Don't you know that your bodies are parts of Christ? So then, should I take parts of Christ and make them a part of someone who is sleeping around? No way! ¹⁶ Don't you know that anyone who is joined to someone who is sleeping around is one body with that person? The scripture says, *The two will become one flesh.* ¹⁷ The one who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him. ¹⁸ Avoid sexual immorality! Every sin that a person can do is committed outside the body, except those who engage in sexual immorality commit sin against their own bodies. ¹⁹ Or don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you? Don't you know that you have the Holy Spirit from God, and you don't belong to yourselves? ²⁰ You have been bought and paid for, so honor God with your body.

***GOSPEL LESSON: John 1:43-51**

⁴³ The next day Jesus wanted to go into Galilee, and he found Philip. Jesus said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Philip was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter.

⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law and the Prophets: Jesus, Joseph's son, from Nazareth."

⁴⁶ Nathanael responded, “Can anything from Nazareth be good?”

Philip said, “Come and see.”

⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said about him, “Here is a genuine Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”

⁴⁸ Nathanael asked him, “How do you know me?”

Jesus answered, “Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree.”

⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are God’s Son. You are the king of Israel.”

⁵⁰ Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these! ⁵¹ I assure you that you will see heaven open and God’s angels going up to heaven and down to earth on the Human One.”

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen

MESSAGE: “Conversation to Proclamation”

Before worship last week, I talked about the word “Epiphany”. I mentioned two words that the translation of the Greek word Epiphany means: “manifestation” and “revelation”. This week I learned that the companion word to revelation is “witness”. For revelation in the biblical sense, it is never open and obvious to everyone, interested or not, believer or not. There is always something about it that is kind

of a radiant obscurity, or concealing that requires faith to grasp the revealing. We are not permitted a controlled, managed, guaranteed, no-risk response to Jesus. Those, therefore, who have beheld the glory become flesh, as stated in the opening chapter of the gospel of John, those who saw the glory become flesh cannot prove it . . . but they can witness to it.

Today we’re going to explore what is and what is not a biblical witness.

Witnessing to the revelation does not refer to lengthy self-disclosures, narrating one’s feeling in response to the word. But rather, witnessing to the revelation refers to the confession of what one has seen and heard. No one understands this better than the author of the gospel of John who, after a prologue announcing the revelation concerning Jesus, and is found in chapter 1 verses 1-18, follows in verses 19-51 with a series of accounts of witnessing to Jesus Christ.

In the gospel of John, witnessing to Christ begins with John the Baptist, who witnesses that he is not the Christ. John’s testimony causes two of his disciples to follow Jesus. (We will more about them in future lessons.) And these two disciples, in turn, witness to their friends, creating an ever-widening circle of testimony, faith, and further testimony. (It’s sort of like the ripples in water after throwing a pebble into a body of water.)

Our reading for today belongs, then, to this widening circle of witness and faith – a circle that, as we will see at verse 51, includes we the readers of this Gospel. The author of the gospel of John has already spoken for the community of faith (“we have seen his glory” verse 14) , but at the close of this text, he will speak to the reader (us) as a member of the community.

The story begins in a clear straightforward way. The place is Bethsaida in Galilee, and the witness is Philip, having recently been called to faith by Jesus, and the listener is Nathanael. The word to Nathanael is faith’s witness to Jesus as the promised Messiah. The response is a reasonable one: the credentials of Jesus hardly qualify him as the one promised by Moses and the prophets as the people’s deliverer. Those of us who regularly evaluate strangers by place of origin, residence, family, education, wardrobe, and station should not find Nathanael’s response unusual.

The invitation to join in faith’s inquiry is extended; “Come and see”. Notice that witnessing invites; it does not argue or coerce, and certainly does not cartoon or discredit Nathanael’s initial doubt. Faith sickens and dies in an atmosphere where doubt is laughed at. I think we can agree with that. Nathanael encounters Jesus’ supernatural knowledge and is persuaded. (By the way; Nathanael is never

mentioned in the lists of Jesus’ disciples in the other Gospels and Acts.)

Thus, a simple story of a person meeting Jesus is elaborated into a Christian proclamation. Clear evidence of this enlargement is found in the shift to the plural form of “you” in the saying in verse 51: “Very truly, I tell you, you will see.” That which began as private conversation is not obviously something to proclaim.

Jesus speaks to all, including the readers. We can find in this form of literary movement (from conversation to proclamation) a pattern of communication that is both effective and congenial to a Gospel that does not pound the listener into a choiceless corner. Notice also that verses 50-51 include the readers, living as they do at a time and place distant from Galilee, within the circle of Jesus’ followers. In fact, rather than being at a disadvantage as though they were secondhand believers, the readers (including us) will, because of faith, see even “greater things than these.”

I invite you to think about these words this week. Where do you find yourself as a listener, glory seeker, one who has seen the revelation? Are you a witness, a proclaimer, or most of all, a believer? Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER:

Sovereign God, Living Lord Jesus, Eternal Spirit, we cannot tell what life will bring us, but we do believe that you will ever leave us, whatever comes. If sorrow comes, comfort us with the hope of glory. If illness comes, help us to bear it gallantly and to reach health again. If disappointment comes, help us always to remember that in spite of everything, the best is always yet to be. If we have to face a hard task or a difficult decision, make us sure that with the challenge there comes the power to do. If we are tempted, help us to turn to the One who was also tempted and who conquered and who can enable us to share his victory. If we are to be misunderstood and unappreciated, help us always to remember that you know us and that it is your verdict that matters.

Especially bless those who are in trouble and distress not of their own making; those to whom what has happened is beyond any explanation that they may accept what they cannot understand; those who have been led astray by someone else, that even yet they may find a way back; those whose background and environment never really gave them a chance. Help them to rise above their circumstances and grant that we who are more fortunate may not rest until we rid this land of conditions in which no one should have to live, in circumstances in which no human being should be entangled.

Bless our world. Bless all those in authority.

Bless all whom we love and especially those from whom we are separated.

Bless each and all of us that we may follow faithfully in the steps of our Lord Jesus Christ until with him we stand before your throne, O God. Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

The generous life rests on gratitude and trust in God's abundance. As we give, we acknowledge that we have communally received more than enough to meet our collective needs. Our offerings serve to realize the reign of God's kingdom on the earth.

***UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION AND THANKSGIVING:**

Generous God, cultivate and nurture gratitude and trust in us. May our gifts be used for the benefit of the kingdom and all creation in your name. Amen.

***BENEDICTION:**

Go in the peace of being fully known by God.

Go in the hope that God has in you to transform the

world.

Go in the love of neighbor and friend.

Go in the assurance that God still goes with you.

Amen.