

Study Guide for January 14, 2018

Theme: Come and See – Christ calls us to Discipleship

Readings: Psalm 139:1-6; 13-18; 1 Samuel 3:1-10; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1:43-51

1 Samuel. The season of Epiphany celebrates the manifestation of God in the early life of Jesus, who, on the eighth day following his birth, was presented to the aged Simeon in the Temple (Luke 2:25-35). Centuries before the birth of Jesus, the story of God's revelation to Samuel established a model of divine selection of a boy to introduce a radical transition from a traditional priestly family to a new priestly lineage. Through the Word, as through most everything, God reveals great things into the world. Samuel is just one great example.

Psalm. There is a dualism to God: transcendent but also immanent, just but also gracious, omnipotent but also personal. This psalm is a fascinating look at how God's nature is knitted into us to make one single garment of divine providence. It's about a personal relationship between the writer and God who is weaved in our innermost thoughts, our actions, and the meditations of our hearts. According to the late Dr. John Leith, "Every human being has every moment to do with the living God." God is the encompassing reality in whom all that "lives and moves and has being." That's you and me, and even our pets!

1 Corinthians. In the first letter to the churches in Corinth, Paul offers a pastoral perspective on sexual ethics within the Christian community. At first glance this letter seems to diverge from the rest of the lectionary. But in respect to this week's theme, how Jesus invites us to live a way of life that is reflective of God's will, Paul reminds us all that God's being is a part of us, and as such we should live in a way that invites others to "come and see" God through us. Our lives might be ordered by commitments to many different worldly things (career, nation, church, family), but that does not excuse us from placing our life and loyalty first and foremost with Jesus Christ who is the head of the Body, the Church.

John. Coming off the heels of Epiphany, the lectionary plants us somewhere between Christology (the meaning and study of Christ/Messiah) and Discipleship (our study and practice of Christhood). No one, in my opinion, does a better job than John's gospel, who stands with us in the mysterious middle of the Word made flesh and the gritty joy of our attempt to respond. Along with Jesus, John prepares our way for Lent and our journey to the cross, by gathering a series of people who seem to be on a quest for something greater than themselves; John the Baptist and his followers (Jn 1:19-42); Nathanael (1:43-51); the wedding guest in Cana (2:1-12); Jews in the Temple (2:18-23); Nicodemus (3:1-21); the woman at the well (4:1-26) to name a few. Each one of us has a quest story, and Jesus!

Jesus invites us to see the fullness of God's faithfulness come to life, and calls us to participate in God's Kingdom. He takes our questions, concerns, cynicism, fears, doubts, and pain and transforms them into righteousness and grace. He is God's love that has been knitted into us. And he calls us to "Come and see" how living in God's love will set us free.

Read: 1 Samuel 3:1-10; Luke 2:25-35

God calls out to Samuel, but typical of human beings Samuel does not recognize it as such. In spite of his misunderstanding of the miracle that is happening, God is persistent and does not give up on Samuel. The same is true for us. God calls and we all will have to answer someday.

Q: How is God calling out to you in these two stories? And how do you respond?

Q: What similarities do you find in your life to that of Samuel, Eli, or Simeon?

Read: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

In verse 17, Paul declares “anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.” And therefore, as he writes in verse 19, his body becomes “a temple of the Holy Spirit” that is not to be defiled. In the early churches there was a dualistic notion that God would destroy the body but save the spirit, which led them to believe that sexual behavior was not a sin. But Paul reminds them (and us) that just as Christ was raised in the body, so too the body of the believer, as a member of Christ, will also be raised at the end of time. In other words, what we do with our bodies, or minds and spirit, does have an eternal price.

Q: What personal struggles does this text shed light on for you?

Q: How might Christ’s invitation to be a part of his self-giving love stop you from accepting the world’s invitation to self-satisfaction?

Read: John 1:43-51

Just as the young Samuel mistook the voice of the Lord as Eli’s, so too does Nathanael misunderstand who Jesus is because of where he comes from. Such preconceived ideas about God and God’s activity in the world continue to prevent us from “seeing” or experiencing an authentic encounter with God. But on the other hand, it was in his questions and cynicisms that God placed Nathanael’s epiphany that revealed Jesus to him.

Q: How is God calling to you in this story?

Q: How are you responding, or accepting this call to be a disciple?

Slow Read: Psalm 139:1-18. Remember to focus on breathing and watching for a particular word or phrase that stands out to you. When you find it, meditate and pray over it.

Prayer: Gracious God, open my ears so I may hear the voice of your Son calling me. From the quietest whisper on my heart to the loudest noise in the clutter of my daily life, help me to always respond to the Spirit that calls me home to dwell your glory. Amen.