

1 Samuel 3: 1-10 - In the Small Things

Downton Abbey is back for Season five. Who is watching it? Life is changing for everyone at Downton Abbey but Lord Grantham certainly isn't appreciating it. Life has certainly changed unbelievably in the 90 years since. Servants are rare these days; ladies maids are not widespread. Speaking of rare and not wide spread, a similar situation is found in our Old Testament lesson. The word of the Lord was rare in Eli's day; Visions were not widespread.

Eli himself had lost more than his eyesight. His own sons abused their priestly office and thought life was only about them. Eli just could not see it literally and metaphorically. But God could and had a stern message for Eli and Israel.

The Word of the Lord was rare in Eli's day; Visions were not widespread.

So what exactly did one hear as the Word of the Lord? What did one see in a vision from God? How was one to know? Samuel certainly didn't know.

He was a kid, just an apprentice. He had been dedicated to God but had not yet experienced God. But the lamp of God's presence had not gone out in the sanctuary at Shiloh. It had not gone out as a new generation slept there, and was about to learn how to listen, how to attend to God's call.

God calls to Samuel as he lies down to sleep. Something we all do 99.9% of the time, each night of our lives. I can remember only a few times actually staying up around the clock. Twice when I was in my late teens, enough said. Once when my teenage son tried a stunt that ended in a face plant on pavement and a trip to the ER followed by an ambulance trip to a MRI.

How about you?

Now we don't necessarily fall asleep easily every night. Sometimes our mind won't shut off, or our worries take control of us. This too is part of life. This too is an opportunity to sit up and ask God, "What do you want?" or as Samuel said, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening."

God calls to Samuel in the everyday aspects of our lives, or should I say, in the every night aspects of our lives. God calls, "Samuel, Samuel." God calls not once, not twice, not three times, but four times. In baseball Samuel would have struck out. But God calls until Samuel gets the help he needs in order to respond in the moment, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening."

Like God's call to Samuel, God helps us to respond as well.

We hear God's Word today as we feel compassion for others and pay attention to the divine insistence, the deep inner urge to respond, to reach out, and to give of ourselves. There is a commercial on TV right now where two co-workers are complaining and gossiping about another worker's absence. One comments to the other, 'so and so is weird' and the other agrees. The situation repeats 3 times with the same comments and judgments, but the fourth time the response changes to the positive. And an offer of assistance and inclusion is proffered. Remember Samuel's four times.

We catch the vision of God's New Day, when we turn aside from our busy agendas and sense the divine suggestion to stop judging and take some time to help someone out.

We hear and respond as we offer up prayers, or heart felt moments for one another and the world.

We recognize and respond as we allow God consciousness to surface within us and follow it's leading to share and attitude of gratitude and deep respect with, and for others.

The Word of the Lord only seems rare today; visions appear not to be widespread. But in fact, they come in the small things, the everyday, every night aspects and activities of our lives.

The Application for Today

God is in our every moment, already and always present, inviting us to embrace God's New Day. Now is the time to see it, hear it, feel it, and just allow it to come alive through us.

Hymn #509 I the Lord of Sea and Sky

John 1: 43-51 An Invitation to Heaven's Gate

The Word of the Lord was rare in Jesus' day; Visions were not widespread.

The prophets had not spoken for hundreds of years.

But the Word of the Lord was sounding in the desert.

The Word of the Lord was preparing the way in the ministry of John the Baptist.

The Word of the Lord was drawing Jesus to a vision in the Jordan.

But the Word of the Lord wasn't doing everything! Jesus had to go out and find disciples. First, he finds Andrew and Andrew finds Peter. The next day he finds Philip and Philip finds Nathanael.

When Philip suggests to Nathanael that "we have found the One, Jesus of Nazareth," Nathanael wonders out loud, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Now Nathanael must overcome the barriers to belief when the Word of the Lord is rare and visions are not widespread. For that matter, so must we when we think nothing good is happening in the faith now-a-days. But Nathanael pays attention. He sees and hears, discovers and recognizes what he needs, to say,

"Yes, you are the Son of God." And Jesus tells Nathanael that he will see the even greater things: Heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending.

Now Jesus' reference to angels ascending and descending goes all the way back to Jacob's dream the night after he flees his brother Esau's wrath for stealing Esau's birth rite. Jacob dreams that there is a ladder set up on earth, the top of it reaching to heaven and the angels of God are ascending and

descending on it. God stands beside the ladder and tells Jacob that he will be fruitful and “all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your off springs.”

After his dream, Jacob realizes that he has slept at heaven’s gate and marks the place. So John’s Jesus is inviting folk to discover that he is now heaven’s gate. According to John, Jesus is now our entryway into God. This is the greater insight Nathanael must see. Jesus, the Son of God, that is Intensified Humanity makes the connection, is the connection of heaven and earth. In him heaven and earth are one. If we accept his invitation and follow him, we also will enter into the flow of angels.

Today more than ever, God is calling us to invite others to share in this great sight, this vision of God’s grace. In Jesus, heaven and earth becomes one. In Jesus, we see intensified humanity. In Jesus, the inner spiritual and the outer physical merge into a greater whole. No matter what society says about Jesus, no matter how hard the system tries to bury him or discredit him, or claim that nothing good can come from him, his Spirit, his life keeps popping up and inspiring folks.

He keeps on being heaven’s gate, being our hoped for future, even now!

So as his followers today, our mission is to plant ourselves at the gates of Hope, not the prudent gates of optimism which are somewhat narrower, nor the stalwart boring gates of common sense, nor the strident gates of self-righteousness which creak on shrill and angry hinges, nor the cheerful, flimsy garden gate of ‘Everything is gonna be alright.’

But a very different, sometimes very lonely place as Jesus knew, the place from which we see the world both as it is and as it could be, as it might be, as it will be.

This is the place from which we glimpse not only struggle, but joy in the struggle.

The gates of Hope open to us the Mystery in the midst of Life.

There we beckon and call, we share what we see God doing and ask others what they see. When we plant ourselves at the gates of Hope, grace abounds and the future of the Faith comes alive.

Application for Today

In these times of radical and rapid change, we are called to answer with active hope.

Amen.

Hymn #567 Will you Come and Follow Me