

ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

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ASSUMPTIONS

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Text of a Sermón preached on the 2nd Sunday after Epiphany

January 17, 2021

I SAMUEL 3:1-20 | PSALM 139:1-5, 12-17

I CORINTHIANS 6:12-20 | JOHN 1:43-51

When we open the bible, when we hear the Scriptures read, or more precisely, when we open our hearts to what we are listening to, we hope to hear God's word. It is important today, in this momentous week when we are praying for a peaceful transfer of power, and real progress in our war against the Corona virus, to grapple with listening for God's voice in a post truth world, where many of our neighbors

seem to share a different set of facts that we do, different assumptions about what our lives together should be about.

So we are both surprised, and in a strange way, encouraged to hear that the boy Samuel, Hanna's child that had been dedicated to the Lord because Hanna had been barren for years, was ministering to the Lord under Eli in a time when "the word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread." Whew. I guess it wasn't always so clear back then, even in the bible days.

The story is so rich. It turns out, that while Eli is able to teach his pupil how to listen to the voice of the Lord and respond, the clear verdict is that Eli has lost his way; he has stopped listening to the Lord. We learn that the Lord's first message to Samuel is to pronounce judgement on Eli and his sons for their absolute failure of leadership. And on top of that, Eli knows full well that word is true. He accepts that judgment. Eli knows he has failed to keep his sons in check, to root out the corruption and lies that end up perverting justice and breaking the trust of the people in their institutions and in each other.

That sounds familiar, doesn't it. We cannot live together without an agreed upon set of facts, without the grace to accept the judgement that we have gotten it wrong, and that there is someone who will demand the truth from us, on behalf of all of us.

In a wonderful way, this need for honesty and accountability shows up in our Gospel lesson as a playful joke. It is summed up in the ironic, careless comment of a young lad sitting under a fig tree. Really? "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?!" Jesus loved over hearing that in the Spirit. When he met this young man he smiled and said: "that's what I like, honesty!" Here is a citizen in whom there is no guile, no deceit. He speaks his mind.

Nathaniel was shocked into faith not just by realizing the insight that Jesus had into his heart, that could only come from God. He was also shocked into faith because he was going to have to reevaluate

everything he thought about Nazareth, about how God sees, evaluates and sustains his word. Jesus asked him to reflect on how Jacob's mind was opened by a ladder at Bethel, and to be ready for how every power would be reevaluated on a cross at Golgotha.

For us sinners, too often the truth dies at the hands of our assumptions about the world, what we think we know are certainties, but turn out to be based on bad schooling or worse character. Once again we will think this weekend of the life and legacy of Martin Luther King. We might want to be reminded that in so many many ways, America did not have a chance to certify a free and fair election until 1964 and the passing of the Civil Rights Act. Many an honest historian has concluded, this is the date when we started our experiment in true democracy, where every citizen's vote was not suppressed and was equally valued.

In recent years, a divisive or offensive action will be met with outrage and often a statement: "This is not who we are." Yet the difficult truth is, because of so many unexamined assumptions, it turns out that the forces ripping us apart are telling us exactly who we are. We are a country founded on liberty, equality and prosperity, but also on prejudice, exclusion, and racial violence.

Can anything good come out of our nation's original shame and sin of slavery? Let us lift up the legacy of the black church that embodies the principles of non-violent action for social change. It allows the majority in our country to see how Christ is incarnated in different communities, in different souls, in Nazareth and beyond. It cries out, we will survive, we will overcome, but above all, we need each other. Indeed, as though right on time, it has given us the first black Senator since reconstruction.

Here is the thing. Nine of us who claim to be a Christian have the whole truth, none of us plate perfect. The law and the prophets are there in the Scriptures to correct and guide us. They always have been. They are not the reason that in a given moment the word of the Lord is rare among us.

The word is rare and visions not widespread because we are not listening, we are not laying down our assumptions. Our attitude is will not best fruit. Think of it this way.

God did not withhold a word - or the power to hear it - from Samuel. God did not abandon the people to the corruption of their religious leadership. God did not refuse to speak even where God's words were not listened for, and God did not refuse to appear even where God's visions were not looked for.

A scarce word is an especially precious word. A scarce vision is an especially precious vision. If it can only be heard or seen by a young boy serving a failed priest, so much greater is its power.

So, God came to the help of God's people. So God will come, one way or another, to the help of God's people. It will be in a way we do not or cannot expect, from a voice we are not prepared to hear. But the help will come.