Come and See

January 15, 2006 (Second Sunday after Epiphany, Year B)

1 Samuel 3:1-10(11-20) Psalm 63:1-8 1 Corinthians 6:11b-20 John 1:43-51

Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." (John 1:46)

There are some very strange goings on in today's readings.

Eli can't get to sleep. Young Samuel comes to Eli three times because he hears a voice calling out his name, there in the waning lamplight of the temple rooms. He assumes it must be Eli – just the two of them there. Time number one and time number two Eli simply says 'I didn't call you; go back to bed.' Time number three Eli finally tumbles to what's happening: the voice is God's voice. Eli tutors Samuel on what to do should God call out again.

Scripture records what happens next:
Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

It is an episode of faith's memory, quite like many others in the rich matrix of Hebrew scriptures – the encounters between the Holy God who chooses to be manifest – even to speak and give direction – and those who understand, although slowly, that they stand within this intimate but elusive presence.

Now, much later, in John's Gospel, there is another account of holy self-manifestation – of epiphany. Jesus is described in process of calling his disciples. He meets Philip and says, quite simply, 'Follow me'. Without further explanation or detail, Philip apparently just agrees. Philip then goes out to find Nathanael. He shares this news but Nathanael responds with a skeptical question: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip simply responds "Come and see." Off they go.

John writes: *When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!"*

In effect Nathanael responds: "Wait just a minute! How do you know me and how do you know that about me?" Then there's this whole strange business about Jesus' reply: "I knew it because I saw you under a fig tree earlier."

There's a lot of variant scholarly opinion regarding what that's all about. The point of real issue is that Jesus' response is a convincing epiphany to Nathanael. He gets it, or at least he gets it enough to say in effect "You are the One."

Then John has Jesus saying: "if you're impressed because of what I said about you and the fig tree, just stay tuned because more, much more, will be manifest."

Epiphany – wondrous, elusive, sometimes overwhelming, luminous manifestations of holy presence, holy intention, holy destiny – profoundly valued in faith's memory – not just once, but time and time again.

But what and where is our Epiphany? We're not Samuel or Nathanael. Beyond the world of scripture's memory, where are our epiphanies?

We get wrapped up in our preoccupations that separate us from important moments of experience; we are limited by our hesitations, our own forms of denial and skepticism. We need to take Philip's direction: "Come and see." Epiphanies come while we're making the journey – not while we stay insulated and hidden.

Often epiphanies come unpredictably, unbidden – we might sometimes say we're caught 'off guard'. Let me share a little bit of what epiphanies means to me, quite personally.

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Sometimes it's the holy glory of Bic's playing of hymn tune or voluntary, truly transcendent and luminous.

It's what happens quite often when I bring the chalice to Bryen and Teddy who step out of their Spiderman motif and look at me with eyes that tell me, beyond words, they know something special is happening, and I feel deeply God is in our midst doing a wondrous thing in the life and growth of our children.

An epiphany took me to darker depths the other morning when I looked at the newspaper photo of a weeping Iraqi man with arms grasping the shrouded body of a lost loved one, and my spirit cried out "How long, O Lord, how long! What will end this madness?"

Every epiphany in our lives reaches out to us and invites us to continue and to cherish the journey. "What is happening here?" we ask, and the repeated response is "Come and see."

My listing just now is very partial; it is at most illustrative of God's gracious, recurrent and unceasing self revelation for one person.

The more important question for all of us, in our own spiritual reflection, is: where are our epiphanies – those unbidden, luminous, confrontative and finally transformative encounters?

Important? Yes, for in those moments, we most clearly see ourselves, we most deeply understand our destiny and our calling as God's people.

What is the epiphany of our parish future? That's an essential question as we look toward our first annual meeting with a new rector and use that time to share the needs, the hopes, the vision that must shape our planning and our common life.

Important? Yes, for epiphany is more than what we experience in special moments. Epiphany is what <u>we</u> are meant to be and to become more fully. We are to be the light of God's manifestation in the many places where our lives matter and take focus. Does that seem an awesome prospect?

It feels that way to me for I know much more than I'd like to know about my own limits. That is real, no hiding from it. But God still makes God's claim on me, on you, on this tiny parish, on the whole larger yet fragile communion of God's people.

Where is God's epiphany for us?

How will that epiphany be found in us and in what we do?

The answer is both simple and complex: "Come and see".

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