

twelvebaskets



EPIPHANY 2B

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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Second Sunday After Epiphany - Year B

14th January 2024



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

13 STF – Sing of a God in majestic divinity OR

61 STF – Our God is a great big God

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

7 STF – God who made the stars of heaven OR

673 STF – Will you come and follow me?

Readings: 1 Samuel 3:1-10, 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, John 1:43-51

Hymn:

782 STF – Thuma mina (Send me, Lord) OR

636 STF – O love that wilt not let me go

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

663 STF – I, the Lord of sea and sky OR

563 STF – O Jesus, I have promised to serve you to the end

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

545 STF – Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart

662 STF – Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?

Blessing

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Call to worship

Lord of Light,
Prince of Peace,
Almighty Counsellor,
Today we gather in your name,
And look to you to shine your light into our lives.

Come Lord Jesus, by your Spirit,

Amen.¹

Hymn:

13 STF – Sing of a God in majestic divinity OR

61 STF – Our God is a great big God

Opening Prayers

The night is growing old, and the dawn is about to break,
We hear God calling out to us. In the haze, we respond,
Here I am.

We go about our days, focusing on the now and next,
the sounds, smells and franticness overwhelm;
and then we hear God calling out to us. In the chaos, we respond,
Here I am.

We are drawn to the images on the news,
the comments that appear on our social media feeds,
We get angry, pained, distraught, and on occasion feel thankful for what we see:
God calls us, hidden in the headlines. In the deluge, we respond,
Here I am.

We gather here today, in the light of the morning,
the cold breeze on our face, the sounds of kettle boiling,
of hearing about our weeks.
God calls out to us now, in this moment.
How should we respond?
Speak, for your servant is listening.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Tim Annan-Hood

All Age Talk

Now, let me tell you a story. Imagine a young girl named Emily. Emily loved art but was a bit shy about sharing her drawings. One day, her friend Alex saw her sketching under a tree during lunch. Alex was amazed by Emily's talent and said, "You know, you should enter the school art competition."

Emily hesitates, thinking, "Can anything good come from me? There are so many talented artists in our school." But Alex encouraged her, saying, "Come and see for yourself. Your art is unique, and I believe you can win."

Emily decided to give it a try, and to her surprise, she won first place! There was something in her that others saw.

We look at our New Testament passage, which we will hear later in our service, from John 1:43-51. Nathanael approached, Jesus saw him and said, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." Nathanael was surprised and asked, "How do you know me?" Jesus replied, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

Just think about that for a moment. Jesus knew Nathanael, not just who he was, but what he was doing even before they met. It's like Jesus sees us too, knows us deeply, and calls us to follow him.

In both of our stories, Jesus sees the potential in each of us. He knows us intimately, even the things we do in private, and he calls us to follow. Just like Philip invited Nathanael to "come and see," Jesus invites us to experience his love, grace, and purpose for our lives.

Let us pray,

All knowing and understanding God. We thank you that you care for us, so much that you call us to follow you. Help us to say yes to you and your opportunities in our lives so that we might flourish.

Amen.³

Hymn:

7 STF – God who made the stars of heaven OR
673 STF – Will you come and follow me?

Readings: 1 Samuel 3:1-10, 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, John 1:43-51

Hymn:

782 STF – Thuma mina (Send me, Lord) OR
636 STF – O love that wilt not let me go

³ All Age Talk written by Matthew Forsyth

Reflections on the readings

At this time of year many of us pay close attention to the weather forecast... is there going to be snow? Will ice make our roads dangerous? Are we expecting the sort of winds and rain which could cause damage or flooding? Wouldn't it be interesting if we also had access to a forecast about the spiritual climate we are experiencing? That may sound rather strange, but in the two readings we are looking at today the spiritual climate of the time is an important factor to note.

The call of the boy who was to become one of the great prophets and men of God in the Hebrew Scriptures comes in the third chapter of the first book of Samuel. We remember that Hannah, Samuel's mother, has given the boy to the Lord in gratitude for his conception and birth after years of barrenness, and now he is living in what is referred to as the temple at Shechem (although we should note that this is not the Jerusalem Temple, that has not yet been built). The priest in charge is an old man, Eli, and Samuel is described as 'ministering to the LORD under Eli'. This chapter begins in this way; 'The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.' So that's the background to the story of God speaking by night to Samuel, that's the spiritual climate if you like, and it explains certain elements of the story – we'll come back to that.

Samuel's lifelong ministry brings in a period of much brighter weather, spiritually, and the stories of both books of Samuel and both books of Kings tell tales of how God worked with and through the nation of Israel – and quite often of how God worked in spite of them! There are good kings and bad kings, true prophets and false prophets, acts of heroism and acts of foolishness, but in all of these sagas, God is very much a player. The people expect to hear from God regularly, through their prophets mainly, and they do. Instructions, guidance, rebuke, calls to repent – all are regular occurrences, compared with the years which have come before Samuel.

But then, God seems to fall silent again. Between the final book of the Old Testament, Malachi, and the opening of the New Testament, there lies a period of about four hundred years, sometimes referred to as 'the four hundred silent years'. None of the books of the bible we now use date from those four centuries and there is little evidence of God's interaction with God's people.

So that is the background into which all four of the gospels enter so dramatically and in which our gospel passage takes place. Suddenly God is speaking again into a dry spiritual climate which has forgotten how to listen. I wonder what you think about the spiritual climate of 2024? Do we hear from God? Do we expect to? Perhaps we will come back to that later as well.

In both stories, however, there is someone who is listening. Indeed, if there hadn't been, we wouldn't have the stories. The child Samuel clearly hears the voice of God calling him by name during the night. Samuel is lying near to the Ark of the Covenant, believed to be the very dwelling place of God, so he is as close to God as he could be when he hears his name. Immediately he runs to Eli, believing it is Eli who has called him, but the old priest denies that and sends him to lie down again. Twice more God calls and twice more Eli sends him away. This is indeed very clear evidence of the statement we noticed at the beginning of the chapter – 'the word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread'. Eli is the leading religious professional of his day – and yet when a voice comes in the night it has to call three times before Eli twigs that it might be God! Eventually the penny drops and so at the third interruption he tells Samuel what to do if he hears the voice again; 'Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening."' Samuel does so and indeed the LORD does call him again and, when Samuel

responds as Eli instructed, the boy receives a weighty message – one which it will be difficult to pass on, for it concerns the end of Eli's family.

We have been told (in v 7) that at the time of this call, 'Samuel did not yet know the LORD and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him', but this story changes that – from now on Samuel is a faithful and trustworthy prophet of God whose words and actions guide the nation through many turbulent years – but that is another story! What we notice today is that despite the arid spiritual climate of the time in which he lived, Samuel heard and responded to the voice of God.

Now let's jump a thousand years from the time of Samuel and take a weather check for the opening of John's Gospel. We've noted already that there has been a long period of silence, of inactivity and, we assume, many of the people of Israel have stopped expecting anything different. Indeed, they haven't been alive at a time of frequent prophesy or religious fervour, so that's not part of their story. But, we note, there are some who have not forgotten that God has promised to return.

When Philip of Bethsaida meets Jesus he immediately finds his friend Nathanael and describes his encounter with Jesus in this way; 'We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.' Philip is clearly paying attention to the ancient prophecies and history books and believes that God will act again, that God will send someone to deliver Israel, that God has not finished with the nation yet. Nathanael is a little more circumspect, surprised initially that any person or movement of significance could come from a northern backwater such as Nazareth, but when he meets Jesus, he also appears to be convinced at once.

Jesus tells Nathanael that he saw him before Philip called him, sitting under a fig tree, and this knowledge alone seems to be enough to persuade Nathanael that Jesus is someone special. There is lots going on in this conversation – fig trees were often used to represent Israel, so the linking of Nathanael with such a tree underlines the words Jesus uses in describing him as 'an Israelite in whom there is no deceit'. Jesus develops this idea further, and with some slight irony, by telling Nathanael that he will see 'angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man', a description which must bring to mind the story of Jacob and his ladder in Genesis 28. Jacob, of course, was a man in whom there was a great deal of deceit, but those too are stories for another time!

So we have Samuel, attentive even in a time when people didn't expect to hear from God, and we have Philip and Nathanael – along with Andrew and Peter and others who will be called in the coming chapters – looking out for the one who was foretold by Moses and the prophets and recognising in Jesus that God is indeed amongst them.

It all begs the question, what about today? What is the spiritual climate of Britain in these days? That may be something you want to talk about after the service, or in small groups during the week. Our answers to that question might vary, but the next question is even more important. Do we expect to hear from God? Do we listen? Do we recognise the voice of God? Do we, as the church, help others to hear and recognise the voice of God as Eli eventually did for Samuel?

Hard questions... and the answers are hard too. Hearing God, following Jesus, sharing the words of God, none of these things make for an easy life as Samuel, Philip or Nathanael would bear witness. But I don't think they would have had it any other way.⁴

⁴ Reflection written by Jill Baker

Hymn:

663 STF – I, the Lord of sea and sky OR

563 STF – O Jesus, I have promised to serve you to the end

Prayers of intercession

Holy God, we come to you in awe, recognising your power and glory and feeling very small. Yet we have heard you calling us to walk alongside you, to hear your voice, to discern your will and to pray for your world, so we offer our prayers through your grace.

We pray today for this world which you have made. A world in which many live without knowledge of your presence or your love. Speak again, Holy God, speak today to all who need to hear your voice.

Your kingdom come, your will be done.

We pray today for the lands in which we live. Lands where the church is often seen as irrelevant, lands where selfishness and greed often dictate policy and behaviour. Speak again, Holy God, speak today to all who need to know your goodness.

Your kingdom come, your will be done.

We pray today for the community in which we live. A community where so often those with the loudest voices get the best deals and others are trampled on. Speak again, Holy God, speak today to all who need to receive your justice.

Your kingdom come, your will be done.

We pray today for the church. A church which doesn't always hear properly, which doesn't always have the courage to obey, which doesn't always get it right, yet a church which you love. Speak again, Holy God, speak today to all who need to know what to do next.

Your kingdom come, your will be done.

We pray today for all who are in particular need, close to home or around the world; for those who are in pain, those who are troubled in mind, those who are grieving. Speak again, Holy God, speak your words of healing and comfort.

Your kingdom come, your will be done.

We pray today for those who are anxious about the cost of living, or who are without shelter, food and clean water. We pray too for all who are working for justice and peace in all lands. Speak again, Holy God, speak your words of challenge and change.

Your kingdom come, your will be done.

We pray today for ourselves. We can be so deaf to your call, we might not even expect to hear from you. Speak again, Holy God, speak to us today and call us once more to follow you.

Your kingdom come, your will be done.

A period of silence.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Jill Baker

Everlasting God, who gives gifts so generously, who has blessed us so richly, accept these gifts here today, that they might be used to the transformation of this world, for the discovery of the love, hope, grace and peace that flows from you, out into the world.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

545 STF – Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart OR

662 STF – Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?

Blessing

So, people of God,
We go from this place, hearing words of encouragement from the Creator,
We go from this place, inspired to follow in the ways of the Christ,
We go from this place, transformed by the power of the Spirit,
Travel with us, triune God, that we may come to know you more each day.

Amen.⁷

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker