

2 Epiphany

January 18, 2015

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

1 Samuel 3:1-10

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

John 1:43-51

The prophet Samuel, and the Apostles Peter and Nathaniel had all been preparing since childhood for their calling to serve God. Hannah had been unable to have children, and vowed to give her firstborn child to God, if God would allow her a child. She took her son Samuel to the temple while he was an infant. He lived in the temple; and for his entire childhood was surrounded by prayer and teaching about God. He grew up observing and hearing the ways of serving God.

Philip and Nathaniel were Jews, and so they had grown up being taught the history, the tradition, the prayers, and the life of first century Jews. They studied the Torah, and regularly went to the temple to worship. Nathaniel did not have to question the idea of there being the promise that God would send a Messiah. That expectation was in Nathaniel's DNA. You can hear the excitement in Nathaniel's voice when he realizes whose voice he is hearing: "You are the Son of God!"

Philip and the other Apostles often would tell people they met that Jesus was the "one who was to come". Their lives, their cultural environment, their upbringing prepared them for the moment that Jesus said to them "Follow me". They already knew his voice.

We live in a time and a culture where those first steps are badly lacking. Few people experience any kind of 'preparation' in their upbringing that will sensitize them to the presence and actions of God in the world. We cannot assume that other people have experienced immersion in prayers, tradition, worship, and a shared life in a mutually supporting community like this one. Over time I have had a good number of people tell me that they have never experienced the kind of faith community we have here; it is special and it is unique. When some of our members have had to move from the Bay Area, I have told them that I hoped as they looked for a new church family, they would not settle for less than what we have here.

A big part of our culture does not know the stories of our faith anymore. They do not know what it means to have a calling, or to even be prepared to receive a calling. There is no awareness of the concept that their gifts should be used to serve God and to serve others.

It is up to you and me to bring back this notion of spiritual growth that involves preparing oneself; waiting in prayerfulness and listening, for the voice of God to direct us, to call us to “Follow me”; and then, as Eli taught Samuel, to know how to answer the calling. By our being here in worship together, we share the faith story with each other every week. We learn to practice prayerfulness. We share with each other what the voice of God has sounded like to us. You and I are the front line; to talk about, and live out, and teach and pass on what God’s voice sounds like, and how to respond when God calls. Our worship is not only an event we do, it is who we are.

For those who make the decision to study the Christian story, and to learn about the character traits of our God, we have been prepared to become bold in faith like Samuel, who became a great prophet, or like Nathaniel, whom we also know as Bartholomew, who travelled as far away as India to preach the Good News that Jesus had taught him.

Jesus promised the disciples that by answering his calling to them, the heavens would open up, and the connection between heaven and earth would be so much more than Jacob’s dream of a ladder connecting the two; but the connection would be experienced in the person of Jesus Christ. By answering the calling, their lives were transformed forever. Our lives have been transformed forever. We carry the Light that has the power to transform the people God puts across our path in life.

How do you carry our faith forward to the next generation; how do you invite others into this life; how do you share the power that can transform a life?
 Do you take on emotional support and prayer support and financial support for children in Africa whom you may well never meet in person, but do it knowing that you are materially changing their lives for the better?
 Do you invite a friend or a relative to have their child join a preschool that teaches Christian values?
 Do you invite friends to Bible Study or to our fellowship events?
 Do you visit a dying friend to assure her of God’s love?
 Do you invest yourself in actions that will transform lives and bring glory to God?

The future of this church, and even the future of this faith, depend on the Elis and Samuels, the Philips and Nathaniels – it depends on you and me to live out what we have been prepared for since our first Sunday School class, and our first time in church; to hear God’s voice, to answer God’s calling, and to serve God filled with a full measure of excitement that we have been chosen. Amen.