

2 Epiphany

January 15, 2012

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

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

John 1:43-51

The Gospel story is the classic example often given for how evangelism works. Philip had been a disciple of John the Baptist, but following Jesus' baptism by John, he was now travelling with Jesus. When Jesus passed through the town of Cana on his way back to Galilee, Philip went to his friend Nathaniel, and said that he should see this man Jesus; he is very likely the Messiah. And so Nathaniel came and experienced Jesus, and became the disciple we know as Bartholomew.

Nathaniel had been sitting under a fig tree; it was a common practice for devout Jews to spend time reading Scriptures and praying in the shade of a tree. It always struck me that Nathaniel had such a strong reaction to Jesus' seemingly simple statement that he had seen Nathaniel earlier under the fig tree.

But Jesus also talked about Nathaniel seeing the angels ascending and descending between heaven and earth. That is a clear reference to the vision Jacob had in a dream about a ladder between earth and heaven. Jesus described what he knew Nathaniel had been reading under that fig tree. One commentator I read suggested what Jesus' words probably meant to Nathaniel: As he sat studying and was approached by his friend Philip, he could have thought that maybe this is the day; maybe the Messiah has come to be that ladder, to connect heaven and earth. By Jesus confirming what Nathaniel had been thinking, he knew that Jesus WAS that person, and in fact he was the very ladder that connects heaven and earth. That would certainly explain Nathaniel's response to Jesus.

In our OT reading, Eli helped Samuel recognize God's voice. Even though God was there, and in fact even spoke to Samuel, he didn't know it. It took the guidance of old Eli for Samuel to recognize, and know how to react to, God's presence. The Eli in my life was a Baptist minister in my home town in northern New York. Since I was a child I could feel that there really was a God, and it felt right to pray to and worship that God. But I had no personal experience that God was in MY life; personally involved in MY life. Pastor Jim (McEatheron) taught me awareness of God. And that changed my life.

Who has been your Eli, to help you recognize God's voice?

Back to the story of Jesus meeting Nathaniel, Philip brought him to meet Jesus. He didn't kidnap him, or scare him with the cost of losing his one chance to meet the Son of God in person, or give him a 45 minute sermon. He simply said 'Come and see'. He simply brought Nathaniel before Jesus.

The Philip in my life was another clergy person. Father Ron (Molriner) in Erie, Pennsylvania; where we lived just a few years after I had met Pastor Jim. A Cursillo was coming up, the first time one was being offered for non-Catholics in Erie. It was being held by the Roman Catholics

to train Episcopalians in the weekend and the follow-up events. In my attending that weekend, I was shown by a whole team of lay people and one Catholic priest
 how close Jesus is to me throughout my day;
 how available Jesus makes himself to my thought process and my feelings;
 how Jesus knows me so well that he can hold me accountable even when I try to deceive myself (should I admit that?).

Who has been your Philip, to bring you before Jesus?

Samuel's life changed when he learned to recognize God's voice. He became a great prophet. Nathaniel's life was changed when Jesus found him. We know that he became a disciple – also called Bartholomew. Tradition says that after Jesus' ascension he travelled as far away as India to preach the Good News that Jesus had taught him. So Nathaniel became a Philip for others; just as Samuel became a prophet, and served as an Eli for others.

Following our Epiphany theme, you and I carry the light of Christ in the world. Samuel carried the light of God, but needed Eli. Nathaniel carried it, but needed Philip. This is a core value of who we are as a faith family here at St. Stephen's. We are Eli and Philip for each other. We share experiences of God with each other; we bring our spouses, our family, our Christian siblings, our friends before Christ in our prayers and with our love.

Who has helped YOU recognize that God is with them?

Who introduced YOU to Jesus Christ?

Do you think they know the role they continue to play in your life?

Samuel said, "Speak, your servant is listening". He later served as a prophet.

Nathaniel said, "You are the Son of God!" He later served as an apostle.

What is YOUR response, in belief and in actions, because you carry the light of Christ?

Amen.