

Third Sunday of epiphany, January 17 2021

Normally we would be in panto season, a favourite occasion of many Christmases, to join in the warm glow of Theatreland, to be with the crowds shouting “he’s behind you”, “oh no he isn’t”.

Our readings today have an element of panto about them, as both of them involve misunderstanding and happily end up with a greater revelation of God’s presence than previously.

These stories are entirely appropriate for the season of epiphany, the season to fresh revelations of God and to discover God making himself known in new ways.

Today we will look at each story and see how using ones senses is important, Samuel has to learn how to listen and Nathaniel has to change his focus to see the Messiah.

Just thinking about it, Samuels discovery of God speaking is on a par with that other old Testament story Moses and the burning bush.

The boy Samuel has been dedicated, set apart as a servant of the temple. In verse one we discover that

the **word of the Lord** was rare, and there were not many visions. This would indicate that the people were not used to hearing the voice of God.

It’s interesting that the reading includes the phrase, “The lamp of God had not yet gone out.” This would refer to the lamp in the temple a physical object, but also I believe it to be a spiritual metaphor that Eli’s influence was waning.

In this passage there is a shift between the two of them, Eli is replaced by Samuel.

Last week I pointed out that Jesus began his ministry at the expense of John completing his. I said John Decreased and Jesus increased. In the same way in our lives we must seek to have more of God, than our own character at work.

By verse 10 at the end of the panto sequence of Samuel running backwards and forwards , he is able to say “speak Lord for your servant is listening”. And if the reading carried on we would’ve heard how God would use Samuel in the nation of Israel not just as a priest, but equally powerfully as a prophet.

If Samuel had to find out how to listen to God, then in the new Testament reading Nathaniel had to be

willing to see the Messiah.

So we move onto the Gospel reading. Philip comes with exciting news for Nathaniel.

Nathaniel is sceptical about the origins of this person, “can anything good come from Nazareth“. Phillips reply is simply “come and see.” The two must’ve been good friends because Nathaniel goes with him.

Before Nathaniel even arrives Jesus speaks about him, Jesus knows Nathaniel from when he was under the fig tree. (This is another metaphor for a peaceful Israelite under his fig tree from the prophet Micah.)

Nathaniel is amazed that Jesus could know him. But it is evident that Nathaniel is looking for the messiah, he’s been reading the Scriptures and so he declares v 49, “Rabbi, you are the son of God, the King of Israel”. Nathaniel’s vision has been enlarged by being known by Jesus.

In response Jesus gives Nathaniel an even bigger version of who he is, echoing the old Testament experience of Jacob, “you will see heaven opened, and the angel of God ascending and descending on the son of man”

So in these two readings we have two people having epiphany moments, revelations of God, in new ways,. Samuel has to learn how to listen, and Nathaniel has to change his vision by being seen by Jesus.

To conclude, As a boy Samuel had been listening to Eli, but now with this shift Samuel learns how to listen to God, Eli decreases that Samuel can increase. This passage challenges us to be attentive, to listen, to be actively seeking, the voice of God. *In the busyness of life, we need to pause, slowdown make space for God to speak to us, and be ready for new ways that God might use us.*

From the second Reading we need to adjust our vision like Nathaniel. He had one idea about the Messiah and positively responded to the invitation to see something different. *Are we ready to see something different, can we adjust our vision of what God might want to do in this nation.*

These two readings are Epiphany readings God revealing himself in new ways and they challenge us to seek a revelation of God in our day, with renewed listening to God and a willing openness to adjust our focus on who God is and what he is requiring of us. Amen.

