

Sermon notes from CMJ
Second Sunday in Epiphany - Year B

Readings - 1 Samuel 3:1-20; Psalm 139:1-6,13-18; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1:43-51
ACNA Reading - Psalm 63

Introduction: Sacred time in the Jewish tradition is historical. Feasts, holidays, and holy convocations form the yearly calendar marking events, miracles, and divine interventions that occurred in history. Epiphany marks the Messiah's theophany, God revealing Himself to the world through Jesus, beginning with the Magi's visit. This divine intervention into man's affairs by God is a historical event marked on our calendars as Epiphany. Jesus continues to reveal Himself, His mission, and plan through the calling of disciples.

Common Theme: The readings this Sunday share the common theme of calling. God knows His heroes. He knows their strengths and weaknesses, and He knows whom He should call for specific tasks. We all have a calling from the Lord. Paul reminds us in Romans that the “gifts and calling of the Lord are irrevocable.” God does not make a mistake when choosing or calling, nor does He take the gifts or call away. If we feel we have somehow missed our calling today, do not worry; the same call will be there tomorrow.

Hebraic Perspective - Receiving a calling from the Lord is not unique nor original to the Christian world. God called His heroes of old, the patriarchs, kings, and prophets, to join in and undertake the Kingdom of Heaven's work. In Jewish tradition, everyone is called to partake in the Kingdom of Heaven. Israel is called to be a light to the nations. Hence the idea of calling in Jewish tradition is usually in the collective sense, although individual Biblical heroes are often singled out for specific roles. Looking deeper at the Hebrew Bible, we also notice that God's calling does not solely rest on the Jewish people but also on Gentiles. Noah, Enoch, Job, and Cyrus are a few names that spring to mind when thinking of God's calling on the Gentile world

Reading #1 - 1 Samuel 3:1-20: The passage begins with the sad revelation that the “word of the Lord was rare.” The Israelites had embraced idolatry and syncretized their traditions with those of the inhabitants of the Land. Subsequently, the voice of the Lord had diminished. Thus it took time for both Samuel and Eli to recognize the calling of the Lord. Our modern-day culture, with all its false voices, can also hide God's voice from us. Perhaps that is part of the plan of the Enemy. The prophet Samuel reminds us that God does not give up; he continues to call until we hear the voice of the Lord. Verse 19 reveals a true blessing when we receive the calling of God. We will never be alone, for of Samuel it is written “The Lord was with Samuel” and the Lord will likewise be with us.

Reading #2 - Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18: This Psalm beautifully acknowledges the truth that God knows His heroes. “You have searched me, Lord, and you know me.” While the Psalm itself attributes David as the composer, Jewish tradition cites Adam as the original author. God knows us even before we were born. God knew Adam even before He created him and called Him into existence, even breathing life into him with His Spirit. We see this reflected in

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Paul's epistle to the Ephesians as Paul says, "He chose us before the creation of the world." It is good to acknowledge that if God calls us, it is because He knows us, and He knows that we will be up to the task for we also have His Spirit.

Reading #3 - 1 Corinthians 6:12-20: It appears that the Corinthians were abusing what they felt was their "freedom in Christ." Having faith in the Messiah and being saved does not give us permission to lie, cheat, or steal, or in the case of Corinth, to engage in sexual immorality. Being called by God should modify our behaviour. Part of the calling from the Lord is to have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is indeed with us, then we must maintain holiness in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Holiness and righteous behaviour are the marks of true freedom in Christ.

Reading #4 - John 1:43-51: All four Gospels have accounts of the disciples' callings. John's Gospel also notes that several of the first disciples were also disciples of John the Baptist, such as Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. In this passage, we have the calling of Nathanael. Interestingly Nathanael realizes and declares who Jesus is, calling Him "the son of God and King of Israel" in the first moments of actually meeting. It takes Simon Peter several years to declare the same thing. How did Nathanael arrive at the truth so quickly? Usually, we think of Nathanael sitting lazily under a fig tree absently pondering life, only to be interrupted and invited by his brother Phillip to meeting Jesus. In rabbinic literature, sitting under a fig tree was a euphemism for studying the Torah. The fig tree was also a symbol of the coming Messianic Age of peace (Micah 4:4 and Zechariah 3:10). Nathanael was probably an intentional student of the Hebrew Scriptures; he was more swiftly able to recognize the voice of the Lord and the calling of the Lord than the other disciples. Nathanael is an excellent example for us of one way to recognize the Lord's voice: to be familiar with His Word. Immersing ourselves in the Scriptures will help diminish our culture's false voice and help us recognize our own calling from God more clearly.

Hebraic Context: Jesus tells Nathanael that he will see "heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." This reference to "ascending and descending" harkens back to the dream of Jacob's ladder. In Jewish angelology, not all angels dwell in heaven. God does have ministering angels around Him; however, angels also have tasks to perform on earth. Late Jewish tradition even goes so far as to say that behind every blade of grass is an angel whispering, "Grow grow!" Christian tradition holds that many of us, particularly children, have our own guardian angel. In the text, we note that both Jacob's vision and Jesus' declaration have the angels begin their movement by ascending and then descending. Thus they begin here on earth and then return to the earth. It is comforting to note that "those that are with us are more than those that are against us" (2 Kings 6:16).

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ACNA Addendum

Psalm 63 - While most of the previous readings have focused on the calling of the Lord and on God seeking Man, this Psalm instead has the Psalmist seeking God. There is much in this world that distracts us from God or hides the desire for seeking the Lord. Consumerism, abundance, even blessing can diminish the desire in us to pursue the Lord. Often we have to be in a dark place to recognize the light. The Psalm is attributed to David, and David was in a dark place. Paul says that it is suffering that produces hope. While David was running for his life, pursued by evil men and with danger all around, it was then that he wrote, "I earnestly seek you." There are protection and safety in the arms of the Lord. Our souls can and will be satisfied in the Lord. This is Good News and great hope to have.

About the Author:

The Rev. Aaron Eime is the deacon at Christ Church Jerusalem and teacher for CMJ Israel. Aaron studied at the Hebrew University in the Master's program with a focus on early Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Bible. He also studied Psychology and Sociology at Queensland University in Australia. Aaron is a dedicated Bible teacher exploring the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith. He reads Aramaic and ancient Greek, is fluent in German and Hebrew, and has taught internationally including in Europe, North America, Hong Kong, and China. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and three children.