

January 14, 2024
The Second Sunday in Epiphany
St. Stephen's, Catlett; St. Andrew's, Ada
\\S\B-24\Epiphany 2_011424

1 Samuel 3:1-20
Psalm 139:1-5, 12-27
1 Corinthians 6:12-20
John 1:43-51

We get one little snippet from John's Gospel during this season of Epiphany, so it's tempting to focus on that and try and cram all of John's inspired genius into one little homily. But as the late President George HW Bush was so fond of saying, "Wouldn't be prudent." More prudent to use John's Gospel as a window into the other readings and, by extension, into what this second Sunday in Epiphany has to offer us. Epiphany is, after all, the season of light and vision, the season of not only seeing what God is doing, but also responding to it.

Our friend Nathanael thought his vision was just fine and that he knew all he needed to know about God, Israel, and the coming Messiah. He snorted when Philip told him they had found the Messiah, a guy from Nazareth. Nathanael's response was that nothing good could come from Nazareth. Jesus just loved that, and when He saw Nathanael, said, "Finally: an Israelite who speaks his mind." When Nathanael asked how Jesus could possibly know that, Jesus replied. "I saw you," which Nathanael immediately understands as Jesus seeing him the way God sees all of us in Psalm 139, completely and clearly. Nathanael responds to the reality of being in the presence of God. Not everyone is able to see as clearly as Nathanael or as the author of Psalm 139, but the invitation to see more clearly than we do today is extended to each one of us.

Some people find Psalm 139 a little invasive and don't much care for the idea that we have nowhere to hide from God. Others, however, find it very comforting to know that there is nothing about us that God doesn't know, just as there was nothing about Nathanael that Jesus didn't already know. I love how we sometimes edit our prayers to include only the things we want God to know about, and glossing over the stuff we don't want to get into. It's as if God knows only what we want God to know.

Samuel had the same idea with Eli. Samuel was not excited about telling Eli what God had said; even back then, no one liked being the messenger of bad news. What's not in today's reading is the fact that Eli already knew all about his sons' misbehaviors; an anonymous "man of God" had warned Eli about his sons, the trouble they were causing, and the punishment that God would impose a chapter earlier. Eli, for whatever reason, warned them about God's message but then to turn a blind eye to their continued sinfulness.

It's funny what we choose to see and what we choose not to see, just as we choose what to share with God and what not to share. It's as if we deceive ourselves into believing that if we choose not to see it, it's not there, and that if we choose not to tell God about it, God will never know. That attitude tells us that it might be time to take another look at Psalm 139.

And not just Psalm 139, but also the passage we heard from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. If we just skim it, we might miss that key question at the end of the passage: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you?" (1 Corinthians 6:19). That means that even when our eyes are tightly closed to whatever we don't want to see, the Holy Spirit within us sees and responds.

If we think we can decide what we see and what God sees, we're just plain wrong. God has been outside of us – in front of us, behind us, and next to us – since before we were born, and the Holy Spirit has taken up residence inside of us, always watching, always responding, always guiding. Our invitation on this second Sunday of Epiphany is to hear Jesus say to us what He said to Nathanael: "Finally, someone in whom there is no deceit."