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Come and see; go back and listen

1 Samuel 3:1-10

John 1:43-51

Year B Epiphany 2

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Come and see Philip said to Nathanael.

Go back and listen Eli said to Samuel.

Samuel heard a voice calling, he thought it was his teacher Eli, a logical conclusion. Samuel was a boy born of the deep prayer and commitment of his mother Hannah, and so in a sense he was already attuned to the voice of God. She had brought him up in prayer and devotion. Yet here, while he was still young, God speaks to him and with a message he doesn't really understand.

And it is not even a message for him but for Eli, and for Eli's family. And yet Eli confirms for Samuel he had heard God speaking. And Samuel delivers the message which is a judgement on Eli's family who have turned away from God.

We know much less about Philip and Nathanael. In fact Nathanael only appears in this account of the gospel of John, and he is not in any other list of the disciples. And the conversation between him and Jesus seems to be missing a few lines. But whatever goes on in the conversation, Nathanael is invited to come and see, even though he is sure "nothing good can come from Nazareth"!

It is Jesus, in fact, who “sees” Nathanael. Sees who he is as a person, and who he might be. And then in turn Nathanael sees who Jesus is, the Son of God.

Come and see Philip said to Nathanael. *Go back and listen* Eli said to Samuel.

At the time Samuel was a boy we are told “the word of the Lord was rare, visions were not widespread”. The people were waiting to hear from God and Samuel was the first prophet to speak God’s word in a long time. The people in Jesus’ time were waiting too, waiting for God. Waiting and longing for hope, for peace, for justice, waiting to be in a deeper relationship with God.

Come and see, Philip said; *go back and listen*, Eli said.

In the chaos of US politics and in the chaos of the covid pandemic we might also say that the word of God is rare in our day; and we have no vision – we cannot see beyond the next news headline and the next list of cases. Many of us, most of us I think have family – some very close family – and friends overseas living in covid ravaged places. We are worried for them, anxiously waiting for emails, texts and zoom calls. We worry about our border and the new cases and the potential for a new outbreak. We feel guilty sharing photos on facebook of our freedoms to go on holiday and enjoy ordinary life while the rest of the world cannot.

It is a strange way to be beginning the year. So what happens when we *come and see*, and *go back and listen*? If we were a US Episcopalian church right now we would be being invited to zoom classes on how to listen to our neighbor across the political divide.¹

How to reach out and listen to those who are living in the alternate reality created by Trump. How to bridge that terrible chasm that has

¹ <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2021/01/08/presiding-bishop-calls-country-to-face-painful-truths-meet-abyss-of-anarchy-with-healing-love/>

divided the country. I have seen all sorts of programmes pop up on my twitter feed – well done them.

As always we get to be a little behind the rest of the world and for the most part we have escaped the conspiracy theorists and their alternate world. Nonetheless we need to be aware and listen to family friends and neighbours who might fall down some of those rabbit holes. Take the time to see, take the time to listen to those who are feeling adrift in the wash of social media.

And we are called to listen and care for our family and friends around the world who are scared and anxious. Just listen, spend time, be present with them as best we can.

And in the midst of all this we cannot lose sight of what is in front of us – children who need to be made ready for school; jobs that we are returning to; community service that needs us. Soon the political leaders will be back and our government will be trying to deliver on things other than covid – climate change, child poverty, reform in our prisons. All of these things and more need us to *come and see*, and *go back and listen*.

Despite the enormous privilege of our holiday breaks we will be starting the year more anxious and tired than usual. There will be plenty of joy in the year; plenty of hope and good things.

But the shadow of covid will haunt our every day, so what will help us find that place where we can *come and see*, and *go back and listen*? Where we can see each other and see God; where we can listen to each other and listen to God? What can we add into our daily or weekly routine? Like more walking, more sleep, a new interest (I have started yoga, which is pretty challenging!), try a new prayer app; make time for more catch ups with friends.

And if we are truly listening and seeing then watch out for surprising things – Samuel had to speak truth to power; to say to Eli that God was not pleased, to put it mildly. And Nathanael, having disparaged

Nazareth, found himself proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah. That was definitely a surprise.

Come and see, and go back and listen – could be our New Year resolution for 2021.