

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. *AMEN.*

“Lord, you have searched me out and known me.” “Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ’s glory.

The epiphany themes of new understandings and letting light shining out to demonstrate God’s glory permeate all of today’s readings, but they frame this week too. It is hard to listen to Martin Luther King stories, quotations, and lore, and the new and wonderful Obama stories, quotations, lore, and pictures and not think about ways light shines out from these people. Something set them each on fire and pulled them from their home-lives and aspirations, and they leapt into public service at an exhausting, open, and vivid pace, and have been in the public imagination and eye ever since.

Even more in this week, there was the plane crash. Somehow the same old, same old, crash pictures coupled with the unexpected headlines that everyone was safe, that everyone was fine, and that no one was hurt were totally delightful. “Miracle in the Hudson” was only one of the headlines, and not the most extravagant of the reporting. The mood of people and the country was already pretty “up” there is a feeling that something is going right, unexpectedly, and from far beyond our control.

The psalmist says: Lord, you have searched me out and known me. . He continues, ”How deep I find your thoughts. O God! How great is the sum of them! If I were to count them, they would be more in number that the sand; to count them all, my life span would need to be like yours.” The

psalmist felt God's voice, thoughts and action in him and shaped his life to follow what he heard.

How do people know that they are called to a particular calling and who is calling them? Samuel kept sleeping through his call. When he finally figured out that he wasn't dreaming, but that God was speaking, he listened, letting God's voice shape him into the great prophet he became.

Similarly, Paul understood that he himself, as a person of the incarnation was an instrument with which he was to glorify God. He believed that his life of service had been bought by the self-offering of Jesus. His life had been bought to serve God and God's people.

Each of these narratives is direct and personal, but the story of Nathanael is more of an account. Jesus had decided to go to Galilee with Philip, who found Nathanael there. Philip told him that he had found the one about whom Moses had written. Nathanael in a perfect dismissive tone of voice says the equivalent of "Can anything good come out of Chelsea?" or pick the place you'd dismiss...Nathanael sees Jesus, and in a slightly obscure interchange recognizes Jesus as teacher and the Son of God. Even though Jesus asks him how he knew how to identify Jesus, he tells Nathanael that he'll see God's angels going up and down to the Son of Man. True, Nathanael knows who Jesus is and in that knowing, Jesus is free to reveal even more about himself and Nathanael's abilities. There isn't more about Nathanael so we never hear his story lived out, so the story is more an assertion of Jesus identifying Nathanael and Nathanael recognizing who Jesus is. Then Jesus declares that Nathanael will see angels around the Son of Man, This declaration is like Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Son of God. The revelation of Jesus' identity to different people and in different circumstances is what the

collection of Epiphany Gospel readings shows. This one, from John's Gospel, is a fine assertion of what Nathanael and Jesus said to each other, and that they simply knew what they knew, but there isn't much beyond this brisk interchange.

In the story of Samuel, we know some of what he goes on to do. It's that connection of what happens when individuals feel and know themselves identified by God as themselves, as particular individuals and on a path to work for God's agenda. The hitch always with someone's saying "I heard God call me and tell me to do X" is those commands range from Samuel's call, Mary's call by Gabriel, John the Baptist's identification of Jesus, to suicide bombers, and a range of zealots claiming God's authority for doing whatever they feel called to do.

Somehow the Samuel story is particularly engaging because of his drowsiness. It sounds real, because Samuel keeps missing it, which feels real and particularly possible, and we then learn what Samuel went on to do and be. The whole story is not just a simple exchange, but is part of his whole story. The psalm's lines that "Lord, you have searched me out and known me...your eyes beheld my limbs written in your book...How deep I find your thoughts...If I were to count them my lifespan would need to be more like yours" sound like a version of Samuel's story narrated in the first person, or anyone's story as it works itself out in relationship to God who keeps calling individuals. It's a personal experience that has life-long consequences to anyone, everyone who experiences that call in minor or major ways. That tugging is clear in Samuel's story, but I know that tugging more clearly in people I know, in their stories. Some of them are in books, fiction, biographies, and other non-fiction, but also in many people's stories. We all know people who know from

childhood that they'll be doctors to help heal people, and they go right on to do that. I listened to Cynthia Pape this week, as she spoke to our Vestry about her call to the vocational diaconate. She says that she'd been called early, but kept stepping off that path because she was too, too —whatever, too much the way she is. She eventually was persuaded, as part of that call, was that she was called as she is, not as she might be were she someone else, or someone different.

Why do people write poetry? I don't know, beyond it's what they do. The obvious thing is they are called to write poetry; they can't help it; they can't say what they want to say other than fit into some kind of poetry. I doubt I'll ever write poetry, because, although I write and I'm even called to write, I never can settle on a form, a kind of poetry, and for me shape and form matter before the fact. I'd have to decide on epics or sonnets or rhyming couplets and none of those speak to me, let alone through me, and for me, poetry requires form. I could let go of form or learn to ram what I have to say through one of the forms I'm sure about, but nope, I won't do either I'd guess. What I do observe with Samuel is that many people I know who are called to do or be something they find unlikely is, they spend many years, many efforts, much energy in trying to explain why they don't do whatever they feel called to do. Usually it's that they can't envision the way it'll turn out, so they explain why they do their work not their vocations. Don't you know people like that, even each of us, ourselves?

How as a community do we hear God's call to us? Emmett Jarrett says urban ministry is a ministry of waiting and relationships, and we're working at both of those things.

Some of our waiting is done listening to music on Wednesdays and some of our making relationships happens

at coffee hour or at the Light Bite between the concerts and the Presentations. This week people spoke of the founding and creating the State's Memorial Garden of Peace dedicated to local victims of homicide and of the founding and creating our Memorial Garden. Ann Page Stecker wove them together through the themes of remembering, connecting, and courage. As the presentation went along, people from each garden began to use those words, knowing them to be accurate ingredients of their fulfilling God's call to them to find a resting place, a place of respite and memory, of hospitality and quiet for the people in their gardens. Hearing those stories was hearing the way people listen to God's call and chip away at doing what they are called to do—and it's hearing what God calls people to do and reasons for the importance of that work. The hopes that shape each garden were surely about waiting and relationships, and the two gardens began to weave into each other. It was deeply touching and bigger than either garden, or the idea of gardens; somehow that idea was bigger than the garden, the concept, or the two together. They were about a bigger theme of God's healing over time through nature, but it takes time, work, listening, and being ready to engage with God's thoughts and urgings. How does God manifest to us and through us? For each of us it's both personal and corporate, and that we need to trust that if what we hear as God's call to us and we work at it, it will shake out to be helpful and good, fulfilling and useful, and satisfying and challenging. The light will shine out when it's from God's authentic call, and we join Nathanael in trying to recognize Jesus whenever he crosses our path and hope to see those angels clustering around the Son of Man. Let's watch and listen, and hear the way God engages each of us in God's work in the world, beckoning us

each to paradise forever, with the Son of Man, the Son of God. Good News.

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