

New Scotland Presbyterian Church
Worship for the Second Sunday After Epiphany
(video link at <https://www.newscotlandpc.com/>)
January 17, 2021
The Rev. Holly S. Cameron

Prelude

Ryan Dwyer

"Prelude in G"

Introduction

Welcome to worship at New Scotland Presbyterian Church, and a special welcome to our friends from Delmar Presbyterian Church; we are glad to have you sharing our worship today.

There is one announcement: in keeping with our bylaws, we will have our annual meeting next Sunday, January 24, at 11:00 a.m. via Zoom. All those details are being communicated by e-mail, so contact the church office if you have any questions.

Call to Worship

John 1:14,41,16

The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory. We have found the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who brings us truth and peace.

Hymn

Choir

"Jesus Calls Us"

Opening Prayer

Eternal God, your Son, Jesus Christ, now exalted as Lord of all, pours out his gifts on the church. Help us, O God, when we cannot feel your love, when we are isolated, afraid, and unable to see your presence. Lift our heads to see your Son, the light of the world. Show us your mercy and remind us that in him we have life abundant. Take away our fear, and fill us with faith. May your people, illumined by your Word, shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshiped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth. Grant us the unity that your Spirit gives, keep us in the bond of peace, and bring all creation to worship before your throne. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Dear friends in Christ: the angels said to the shepherds in the fields, "Do not be afraid;" at the empty tomb the angels said to the women, "Do not be afraid;" and Jesus said to his disciples, "I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." God understands our fears, and the love of God brings courage to our hearts. Come out of the darkness, into God's light, because you are loved by God, and forgiven by God, and offered a new beginning. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Gospel Lesson John 1:43-51

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also

the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.”⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.”⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!”⁴⁸ Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.”⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”⁵⁰ Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.”⁵¹ And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Kids' Time

For those unable to see the video, the children's sermon is about how Jesus can see us and know all about us, our good and helpful parts, and our hurt and angry and difficult parts. Even though we are not perfect, God loves and chooses us to help make the world a better place. Now it's time to see the photos that remind us of God's love and hope and joy. {photos.}

Keep sending us your photos so we can share them in the coming weeks!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for all the different parts of ourselves. Help us to invite you to the places that give us trouble so they can be healed. And help us to show your love and care to others. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Old Testament Lesson First Samuel 1:1-10

¹ Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³ the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the LORD called, “Samuel! Samuel!” and he said, “Here I am!” ⁵ and ran to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” So he went and lay down. ⁶ The LORD called again, “Samuel!” Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

Sermon

Today we heard the stories of two people who encountered God for the first time. In the Old Testament, we heard the story of Samuel, still a child, hearing a voice calling his name in the middle of the night. Samuel did not know whose voice it was, and so he ran to the old priest Eli, thinking that he must be the one calling out. This happened three times, that Samuel went running to Eli's room, trying to answer the call he heard.

Finally, Eli recognized that the one calling to Samuel was God, and Eli told Samuel the next time he heard the voice to stay and listen to what the voice would tell him. So Samuel returned to his room, and when the voice called to him a fourth time, Samuel asked to hear more, and discovered that it was indeed God calling his name.

In the gospel lesson, we have the story of two men who meet Jesus for the first time. There was Philip who talked to Jesus and recognized that he was the Messiah the scriptures predicted. So Philip went and told his friend Nathanael. And Nathanael went to talk to Jesus. And in their conversation, Nathanael realized that Jesus really was what Philip had said.

In both of these stories, we find that the person being called does not immediately recognize that it is God doing the calling. Samuel hears his name being called, but he does not recognize the voice. Nathanael meets Jesus, but does not know who he is. It is Eli who realizes God is calling Samuel; and it is Philip who tells Nathanael that Jesus is the one they have been waiting for. Even though God is right there calling to Samuel, Jesus stands right in front of Nathanael, it takes another person to help them recognize God's presence.

Sometimes we think an encounter with God would be obvious – a blinding flash of light with a deep, thunderous voice – something unmistakably divine. But think of the moments when God has touched your life. I bet many of those moments were in some quiet or ordinary surrounding, on a mountain or at the ocean, driving down a country road, or in the peace of a chapel. {I have a clergy friend who is always praying for God to do something unmistakable, so that she will know it is really God and not just a coincidence. And my mother has a magnet on her refrigerator that says, "What I'm looking for is a blessing that is not in disguise.} God comes to us in the midst of our everyday lives, and sometimes we do not even recognize it.

If Eli and Philip had not been there to tell Samuel and Nathanael that God was the one trying to get their attention, they might have missed God's presence altogether. Samuel might have rolled over the next time he heard his name, put a pillow over his head, and gone back to sleep. Nathanael might have gotten up from under the fig tree and gone into the marketplace, or stopped in at a neighbor's house to catch up on the local gossip. I do not mean to suggest that this was their one and only chance to meet God, just that they might have missed God's presence in those particular moments, if someone else had not been there to help them see God in front of them.

It is hard for us, sometimes, as people of faith, to talk about our faith. It can feel awkward to let others know that we have a relationship with God, and that relationship is meaningful and matters to us—that it influences us, and affects the choices we make. We are apt to let our fears take over, so we become uncomfortable and fear that we might be misunderstood, or laughed at, or that we might somehow offend another person. But part of living our faith is to notice God's presence, and to invite others to notice it, too.

Let's look again at what Eli and Philip say to their friends. They are witnesses to God's presence, but there is nothing in these stories of what we imagine could be uncomfortable about "witnessing." Some of us feel shy about witnessing to our faith, because we imagine it means we have to back someone into a corner and command them to believe that Jesus is the way, the truth, the light and if they do not believe, then they are condemned to eternal misery.

But that is not what we see in these two stories. Eli and Philip witness to God's presence, but in a quiet way; they each make an invitation to their friend. Eli says, "Go back and ask the voice to talk to you." Philip says, "Come and see." There is nothing here of what we imagine is offensive about evangelism. They do not argue or coerce; they do not try to discredit the other person's doubt or offer pat answers. Instead, there is just a congenial invitation: "Come and see." Find out for yourself what God has to say to you.

Samuel and Nathanael accept the invitations made by their friends; they go to listen and talk, and it is in talking to God directly that Samuel and Nathanael come to believe. Eli and Philip offered the invitation, but it is God who answers the reservations and questions of Samuel and Nathanael.

Having a relationship with God is not a requirement of our lives. It is not something we are forced to do. It is an invitation – an invitation that God makes to each one of us, all the time, to "come and see." The invitation is new every day. The creation is calling out to us all the time to notice the glory of God – but how often do we pull ourselves out of bed to watch the sunrise; how often do we stop to smell the roses; how often do we pause on the way in from errands to notice the stars twinkling in the heavens.

Sometimes, the invitation to notice God is voiced by a person. Someone who says, "I care;" "I understand;" "you are not alone;" "look; listen; taste; touch; notice the blessings around you; come and see."

In our society, we are taught to be independent, to learn and do and think on our own. But sometimes we rely too much on our own thoughts and feelings, and they are not so reliable. As I've heard it said, "I never had a feeling that didn't change." We can get so caught up in our thoughts and feelings that we narrow our world and start believing only what is in our heads.^[1]

There is a reality beyond the one we conjure between our own ears, and it is more real than what we believe in our own minds. When we get trapped by our minds, we stop seeing things as they are, and start seeing things as we fear they might be. Fear has a way of turning everything into the worst-case scenario. It causes us to think things like:

"Am I ever going to have fun again if I get sober?"

"If I leave this internship program I hate, won't I end up in a meaningless job?"

"My relationship has fallen apart, but can I survive without them?"

The answer to our fears is "Come and see."

Come and see that when we let ourselves loose from our greatest fears, there is life, new life, life that we cannot imagine in the confines of our own heads – God's gift of abundant life.

As people of faith, we are called to be a "Come and See" people – to surrender our fears at the foot of the cross to "come and see" how things really are, and to invite others to come and see with us.

With the grace of God, may we hear God's invitations coming to us each day, and may we extend those invitations to others, so that, together, we may see all that God is offering.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Song
"We Will Follow"

Choir

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious God, we come to you first with prayers of thanks. We give you thanks for our shared ministry, for the times we hear your call and respond in faith, for opportunities to share with others the great gift of life you have given us, for opportunities to lift your name on high. We thank you for the beauty of winter, for delight of children, for every story that moves us beyond our caution and our prejudices and fills us with joy and hope. We thank you for your persistent invitations to 'come and see,' and pray that we may not be so focused on the difficulties of this world that we fail to notice you are right beside us.

O God of creation, look with love over the needs of this world. Watch over all those with governing power; help them to hear beyond the shouting voices of this world that they may hear your words of wisdom and truth. Give them the courage they need to do your will and to serve those whose needs are great.

O God of healing, watch over those who are sick in body, mind, or spirit. Protect and sustain those who are caregivers, that they may have compassion for their own well-being while offering solace to those in their charge.

O God of peace, we pray for the end of fighting among and within the nations. We are weary of anger and threats and violence and bloodshed as the only response to conflict. Teach us your way of peace in our homes, our neighborhoods, our schools, our workplaces, our country, and our world. We pray for all who are living in fear, who are lost in the darkness and cannot see your light. Light the candle of your presence, O God, to drive out the dark powers in our world and in ourselves.

Continue to call to our hearts, catch our attention, challenge our thinking, and melt our pride, that we may be true followers of Jesus the Christ.

And hear us as we say the prayer he taught us:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Hymn

Choir

"O Master, Let Me Walk with Thee" #357 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Offering

Scripture says that just as we excel in knowledge, in speech, in earnest striving, we need to excel in the grace of giving, for that is how the well of joy in us begins to overflow. (2 Corinthians 8)

Churches depend on the generosity of members and friends to support their ministries of doing God's work in a broken world. If you are able to mail in an offering, or give online at <https://www.newscotlandpc.com/>, we are grateful. If all you can offer is prayers for the church, we love you for that gift. We are blessed to share our gifts and to

be together as brothers and sisters and friends to love one another, and support one another, and care for one another. We are not alone; we are in this together. Thank you for your generous giving!

Song of Praise

Ryan Dwyer

These are probably the most-sung lines in the last 300 years, so here are both the traditional words, and another variation:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above, you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

To God all glorious heavenly Light,
to Christ revealed in earthly night,
to God the Spirit now we raise
our joyful songs of thankful praise.

Benediction and Blessing

Go out into the world in peace; have courage; hold on to what is good; return no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak, and help the suffering; honor all people; love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. And may the love of God go with you, both this day and always. Amen.

Choral Benediction

Choir

*May God's blessings surround you each day
As you trust God and walk in God's way.
May God's presence within
Guard and keep you from sin,
Go in peace, go in joy, go in love.
Go in peace, go in joy, go in love.*

Postlude

Ryan Dwyer

"Prelude in G"

Sermon Notes

^[1] This paragraph and the following three paragraphs have words and ideas from a sermon “Come and See” preached by the Rev. Reagan Humber, January 14, 2018.