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St. James', Mt. Airy
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Epiphany 2B
1 Samuel 3:1-20
Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17
1 Corinthians 6:12-20
John 1:43-51

**Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;
take our hands and work through them;
take our hearts and set them on fire.
Amen.**

I have a little Latin to start your day:

Vocatus atque non vocatus, Deus aderit

Bidden or unbidden, God is present

This quote, found among the Latin jottings of Renaissance scholar Erasmus, was popularized in its English translation by psychologist Carl Jung, who had it inscribed both over the front door of his home, and later, on his tombstone.

It came to mind as I was studying today's scripture passages as I believe it weaves our readings from 1 Samuel, the Psalms, and John's Gospel into something *more* than any of them are by themselves, teaching us about listening – knowing – encountering God.

Bidden or unbidden...

The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

This observation sets the stage for the beginning of a shift of power for the people of Israel, one which will ultimately lead to the line of kings – for it will be Samuel who anoints first Saul, and then in time, David.

But today we are at the ironical and amusing beginning of one of the great stories of the Bible, when the boy Samuel first encounters the Lord.

Now, the irony comes from the fact that God’s voice was apparently unexpected in the Temple, of all places, and the amusement comes from the play on words that is only evident in Hebrew. I’ll do my best to untangle it for you:

Now Lord called, “Sam-u-el, Sam-u-el,” which means “God has heard.”

And Samuel responded, “Here I am!” and ran to the priest named Eli, whose name means “my God.”

So “God has heard” hears God, who thinks it is “My God” speaking instead of the true God.

Three times we see this happen. It is only after God speaks repeatedly, that Eli’s wisdom awakens and he realizes what is happening. And so he instructs the boy that when God calls him *again* he should answer, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

That is what Samuel does. Because God did call to him again – God is always calling.

In the stillness of the night, with darkness encroaching, though the lamp of God had not yet gone out, God was finally heard.

We don't always recognize it, often we don't hear, let alone truly listen – but God is always present and always ready for conversation, calling us into a new thing.

Bidden or unbidden...

O God, you have searched me out and known me; you know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar.

No matter the translation – *NRSV, Book of Common Prayer*, or even *The Runaway Bunny* – the intensity and intimacy of this scripture passage is awesome.

More than one writer has called Psalm 139 a creation psalm. Not one about the vast mysteries of the heavens and earth, or even the marvelous workings of nature around us. No, this creation is God's own ongoing work in bringing us to fullness of life, the unwrapping of the mystery of each of us as unique individuals,¹ as children of God.

To me, this psalm feels like a warm embrace, bringing comfort and giving strength. The words express an intimate knowledge and involvement of God in our lives.

Here, names are not even necessary. Almost every verse contains pronouns referring to both the psalmist (I/me/my) and to God (you/your). They are intertwined in such a way that God is the very context of the psalmist's life, and indeed ours as well.²

And yet there is an edge to it that is nearly overwhelming – we are *fully* known, there is not a word on our lips that God does not know; God is *always* present, pressing upon us from behind and before – there is nowhere we can go to escape God.

¹ Kathryn Matthews Huey, ucc.org: Sermon Seeds.

² *Feasting on the Word Year B, Volume 1*; page 249.

As the psalmist writes in the middle verses 6-11 which were omitted from what was read today –

*Where can I go then from your Spirit; where can I flee from your presence?
If I climb up to heaven, you are there; if I make the grave my bed, you are there also.
If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
Even there your hand will lead me, and your right hand hold me fast.
If I say, “Surely the darkness will cover me, and the light around me turn to night,”
Darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day; darkness and light to you
are both alike.*

Yes, psalm 139 speaks of the One who created us, who knows us fully and loves us unceasingly, but it also reminds us of the easy to overlook and powerful truth – that God is always with us, in all that we do, and wherever we go.

Bidden or unbidden...

Follow me. Come and see.

We walked through Advent together, celebrating a season of anticipation and preparation. We rejoiced through Christmas together, celebrating the mystery of the incarnation – the birth of ‘God with us.’ We welcomed the magi once again at Epiphany, celebrating also the gift of the water of baptism.

And now we have this short green season of Ordinary days before the start of Lent to explore the manifestation of Jesus – stories that began with his baptism last week and now lead us into a deeper knowledge of **who** he was and **how** he was among us.

And so today we hear from the Gospel of John about Jesus calling disciples. This calling began in verse 35, with the calling of Andrew and Simon Peter, and now continues with the story of Philip and Nathanael.

As far as action goes there isn't a lot here. Jesus found Philip and said to him "Follow me." And that was somehow enough. It was enough for him to go to his friend Nathanael, tell him about Jesus, and say, "Come and see."

Now Nathanael was skeptical, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" But when he saw Jesus, and Jesus *knew* him upon sight, Nathanael too believed and proclaimed Jesus the Son of God, the King of Israel.

What led these men to make such a radical decision to *come and see* and then *follow*? We read of no miracle or sign that Jesus performed, nor any teaching. In this account it seems to be enough that they encountered Jesus, even if they weren't expecting it.

Bidden or unbidden...

Each of these stories about listening – knowing – encountering God teaches us fundamental things:

Even when confronted by the divine, it is possible for us to be oblivious to God's presence in our lives.³

We may 'know' that God is always present, but sometimes it takes a few times before we catch on and pay attention.

³ *Feasting on the Word Year B, Volume 1*; page 261.

We need to say and pray, “Speak, for your servant is listening” a lot more often.

The thoughts of God are greater in number than the grains of sand – and we are always a part of them.

We are sometimes skeptical of the message because of the messenger, yet we are bid to come and see, and follow.

Bidden or unbidden, God is present

I don’t know why this prayer was so fundamental to Carl Jung. I do know that it can become a way for us to live our life.

It is a reminder that throughout it all – the daily-ness, the celebrations, the heartaches, and the gift of the gathered community – we are always in the middle of a conversation with God, invited to listen, knowing we are loved, called to join the great journey with Christ.

~ AMEN ~