

Sermon Notes – January 14, 2016
“Come and See – Discipleship and Wonder”
Brian Walton

There is another scripture appointed for this morning, in addition to the reading of Jesus' call to the disciples. It is a short story and so I thought I would tell it, and return to its wisdom later in the sermon. It is the story of Eli and Samuel from the Hebrew portion of the Bible. Eli is an elderly priest in the Jewish temple. His family have long held this role and in his time Eli has been faithful to his calling. One day a woman brings her son to the temple wanting to dedicate him to the work of God and to have him apprentice under the tutelage of Eli. The boy's name is Samuel and, as was the custom, Samuel moves into Eli's home and learns at his side. In today's lesson it is night time and both Eli and Samuel are asleep, when Samuel hears someone calling out his name. He rises and runs to Eli's room asking what he wants. Eli explains that he didn't call and sends Samuel back to bed. It happens a second time. On the third *occasion Eli awakens* to what is happening and instructs Samuel to return to his room and when he again hears his name to respond, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." We will return to this story. but first let us examine Jesus' call to the disciples.

Scholars point out to us that in this story the verb 'to see' is used three times. In the first instance Andrew encounters Jesus and asks where he is staying. In response Jesus says, "Come and see." In the second instance Phillip has decided to follow Jesus and invites his friend Nathanael to also 'come and see'. Nathanael is hesitant but eventually concludes, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God!" Jesus responds, "you ain't seen nothing

yet! You will **see** the heavens open with angels ascending and descending.”

Well I've never seen an angel, let alone seen them coming and going from heaven, so what keeps me coming back to Jesus and the God-power. What is it I “see” that makes me want to follow this way, especially in a world that is increasingly skeptical? As I pondered what I “see” I recognize at least three things that make me return Sunday after Sunday, season after season, to stand in awe of the Holy Mystery and the Wisdom of the Jesus.

The first “marvel” I have seen is the world itself. Surely the world reveals a creative force that we must stand in awe of. Science and technology have become the lens for examining the wonders of the universe. I want to show you a short clip which stretches my awe and imagination from the greatest of heights to the most penetrating of depths.

When I consider the vastness of the universe, the presence of life as we know it and the symbiotic systems working to animate the human body and the bio-sphere I conclude that there is a creative force at work. Although Julie Payette implied that life is a random occurrence I choose to disagree, and place my faith in a divine intelligence. I do not believe there is a human-like being called God sitting in a celestial control booth but evolution itself points towards a divine intelligence animating and developing life. Darren shared a prayer with me the other day whose author reflects the Awe that keeps me a disciple of the Holy. I would like to share it with you.

O Holy Father and Divine Mother,

from whom all of creation emerges
we bow before you in wonder and adoration.
We marvel that in this past week
we have travelled seven million miles outward
into the mystery of dark space.
Where to, on this ride in our ever-expanding cosmos?
Why here, on Earth,
and now, in this day and age?
We turn to Wisdom,
to guide us through time's evolving story,
we are honoured to be chosen ...
storytellers in this great drama;
and thankful for this breath-taking ride
on our hallowed planet.

Come and see the marvel of creation and you will know God.

The second realization that keeps me returning to the Holy One are those saints who - despite humanity's innate self-interest and Darwin's belief in the 'survival of the fittest' - possess a Jesus-like orientation to live for their fellow human beings. Surely it is a cause for awe and wonder when a simple school girl born to Macedonian parents and educated in Ireland abandons all normal aspirations to wander the slums of Calcutta and bathe the feet of lepers. Surely it is a cause for awe and wonder when the son of a Canadian governor-general abandons his university post to take up residence with two disabled men in the belief that *they* will teach him about life and love. Surely it is a cause for awe and wonder when a

neighbour, such as Helen Smith-McIntyre, abandons personal gain to shepherd the Amnesty International group, Chair the Refugee Coalition, and work tirelessly for human rights in Saskatoon. The power of the Holy One still beckons me to come and see the marvel of those who, despite the pressure to succeed and the temptation of prestige, commit themselves to making and keeping human life human. Come and see the marvel of selflessness and you will see Jesus.

And now we return to the Samuel story. Somehow in his aloneness, a child away from his mother, Samuel hears a voice in the middle of the night, a dream perhaps, or a longing in his soul to know and be known. This is a different kind of marvel - different than the marvels of the universe and different than the selfless examples of the saints. It is a quiet mystery that stirs in the individual soul. Some writers have called it a longing. St. Augustine said our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee. We all know it - this longing for meaning, for understanding, for connection.

Viktor Frankl, an early twentieth century psychiatrist interred in the infamous Auschwitz death camp, later wrote that it was the pull towards meaning that helped him survive. Standing on the front steps waiting for the ambulance to come and retrieve my father's body, weeping in my wife's presence over a crisis of faith, or simply staring off into the vastness of the night sky I search for meaning, for connection. Call it attachment, call it universal oneness, call it the companionship of God – in moments of existential aloneness the Spirit beckons me to “come and see.”

When I hear Andrew respond to “Come and See”; when I hear Phillip say to his friend, “Come and see”; when I hear Jesus say, “Just wait and see” I behold the marvel of the Creative God, the compassion of the self-

less Jesus and the nudge of the Holy Spirit in my soul and indeed want to come.

As a post-script to this sermon, one of the scholars I read suggested that these words, “come and see” challenge us to develop an informed evangelism. The suggestion is that as we discern what we see, that as we identify how the God-power is made known in our life, that it is *our calling* to invite others to come and see. This invitation could be as domestic as inviting others to come and see St. Martin’s and how we engage what is holy; or it could be as global as inviting others to come and see why we need to save the earth, care for our neighbours and orient our lives away from the trivial. A challenge remains – to whom might we offer the call to “come and see” – a neighbour, a stranger, a loved one? At the end of today’s reading Jesus said to Nathanael, “You ain’t seen nothing yet!” Might it be so. Amen.