

## Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Second Sunday after Epiphany – Year B

**RCL Readings** – I Samuel 3:1-10, (11-20); Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; I Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1:43-51

**ACNA Readings** – I Samuel 3:1-20; Psalm 63:1-9, (10-12); I Corinthians 6:9-20; John 1:43-51

**Seasonal Introduction.** Epiphany of the Lord is celebrated on the 6th of January in the Western Christian calendar and the season continues until Ash Wednesday and Lent. Epiphany is a Greek word meaning 'showing forth, appearance, or manifestation'. During this season, the church celebrates the manifestation of the Messiah on earth between the time of His birth and preparation for His death and ascension. The Baptism of Jesus, His presentation at the Temple, and His transfiguration—all events with deep connections to Jewish life and history. Jesus also chooses disciples who will witness and testify to Jesus—His manifestation, His mission and, most importantly, His person.

**Common Theme.** The readings this Sunday share the common theme of calling. As a supreme, and personal, intelligence it would be fair to say that God knows His heroes. He knows their strengths and their weaknesses and He knows whom He should call for specific tasks. We all have a calling from the Lord.<sup>1</sup> Paul reminds us in Romans that the "gifts and calling of the Lord are irrevocable." God does not make a mistake when choosing or calling, nor does He take the gifts or call away. Which means that if we feel we have somehow missed our calling today, do not worry; the same call will be there tomorrow.<sup>2</sup>

**Hebraic Context.** Receiving a calling from the Lord is not unique nor original to the Christian world. God called His heroes of old, the patriarchs, kings, and prophets to join in and undertake the work of the Kingdom of Heaven. In Jewish tradition, everyone is called to partake in the activity of *tikun olam* or the 'repairing of the world'. It is incumbent upon everyone to use their God given skills to make their little part of the world a better place. Israel is called to be a light to the nations.<sup>3</sup> Hence the idea of calling in Jewish tradition is usually in the collective sense, although individual Biblical heroes are often singled out for specific roles. Looking deeper at the Hebrew Bible, we also notice that God's calling does not solely rest on the Jewish people but

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<sup>1</sup> In the pages of sacred Scripture we encounter many people being called by the Almighty for specific ministries and service. The Patriarchs are obvious examples of those called to the service of the Lord; Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Elijah etc. In the New Testament Paul declares that he has been 'called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God' Romans 1:1. Not only are individuals called but so are whole nations. Israel was called to be 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Exodus 19:5). Similarly, the apostle Peter infers that all believers are called to be a holy people (I Peter 1:15). Not every believer will be called by God to a unique task, but every believer is called to be a light, to love their neighbours—to be obedient to God.

<sup>2</sup> This also implies that the calling of Israel to be a light to the nations has likewise not been rescinded. The chosen people cannot become the unchosen people.

<sup>3</sup> Note that the verb is 'is' and not 'was' a light to the nations. Paul's statement in Romans 11:29 that the 'Gifts and calling of God are irrevocable' relates in context to the Jewish people because 'they are loved on account of the patriarchs'. **Make this better**

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also on Gentiles. Noah, Enoch, Job, and Cyrus are a few names that spring to mind when thinking of God's calling on the Gentile world in the Hebrew Scriptures.

**I Samuel 3:1-10, (11-20).** Samuel is an important character in the Hebrew Scriptures as his role is to oversee the transition from the period of the Judges to Kings and Prophets in the governance of Israel. Samuel will anoint the first two recognized monarchs of the Kingdom of Israel.<sup>4</sup> He is also known as the 'father of the prophets'. Concurrent to the rise of kings there would be the rise of prophets.<sup>5</sup>

The passage begins with the sad revelation that the “word of the Lord was rare.” This is despite the fact that the Tabernacle had been long established in Shiloh; a functioning priesthood maintained and served the Sanctuary; and a sacred calendar was in place to regularly bring the people of Israel to Shiloh and His presence. The Israelites had embraced idolatry and syncretized their traditions with those of the inhabitants of the Land. Subsequently, the voice of the Lord had diminished.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps this explains why it took time for both Samuel and Eli to recognize the voice and calling of the Lord. Our modern-day culture, with all its false voices, can also hide God's voice from us. Perhaps that is part of the plan of the Enemy to drown out the voice of God. The prophet Samuel reminds us that God does not give up; he continues to call until we hear the voice of the Lord. Verse 19 reveals a true blessing when we receive the calling of God. We will never be alone, for of Samuel it is written “The Lord was with Samuel”. One of the key features of God's presence with Samuel, that was evident to all Israel (from Dan to Beersheba), was that his words proved reliable. This indicated to the people of Israel that Samuel was indeed a prophet of God because he spoke the truth. (Footnote - perhaps we can add a note here about the early church recognizing false prophets through lies ... see Didache 12, or comment of James 3 and the power of the tongue, or Jesus' let your yes be yes???)

**Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18.**

**I Corinthians 6:12-20.**

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<sup>4</sup> Gideon's son, Abimelech (My father is king), was crowned king by the people of Shechem and he reigned for three troubled years.

<sup>5</sup> Kings were the predominant form of government that God placed over His people—not republics or democracies. However, prophets acted as part of the checks and balances to the monarchy, along with the priesthood. Kings were also supposed to write out their own copy of the Torah and were to carry it with them wherever they went (Deuteronomy 17:18-19). Every king was to have their own prophet to guide and warn them. So it is interesting that Solomon, though he grew up with Gad and Nathan, is not recorded as having his own prophet. Nathan is with Solomon at his coronation but then disappears from the narrative. Solomon's acts are recorded by Nathan, Ahijah, and Iddo—prophets of David, Jeroboam, and Rehoboam. Solomon had priests, secretaries, recorders, commanders of the army, work overseers... and Zabud the son of Nathan was priest and king's friend—but not his prophet (I Kings 4:1-6).

<sup>6</sup> Regular worship attendance, even with functioning clergy and the presence of God cannot replace sound doctrine or true obedience and subservience to God. The Church, despite having the blessing of the Scriptures—the Word of God—and the Holy Spirit, also has a history of replacing obedience with worship, clergy, or the presence of God.

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**John 1:43-51.**

**Hebraic Perspective.** In the gospel portion for this Sunday Jesus tells Nathanael that he will see “heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” This reference to “ascending and descending” harkens back to the dream of Jacob’s ladder in which the patriarch also saw angels ascending and descending. Angels appear throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, 2nd Temple period Jewish literature as well as in Rabbinic literature and New Testament. Angels, called *malak* מַלְאָךְ which has the meaning of *messenger* in Hebrew, are a well established part of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. In Jewish angelology, not all angels dwell in heaven. God does have a myriad of ministering angels around Him at all times, however angels also have tasks to perform on earth. One Jewish tradition says that when God came down at Mt Sinai to give the Torah, He brought with Him 600,000 angels. One for each male Israelite present who had departed from Egypt. The Talmud records a late Jewish tradition that even goes so far as to say that behind every blade of grass is an angel whispering, “Grow grow!” Christian tradition holds that many of us, particularly children, have our own guardian angel. The source of this tradition is steeped in Jewish tradition. In the Scriptures, we note that both Jacob’s vision and Jesus’ declaration have the angels begin their movement by ascending and then descending. Thus the angels appear to begin their missions here on earth and then return to the heavens (perhaps to report). The Hebraic perspective is to acknowledge that the spiritual realm is very close to the physical realm. Angels are present here on earth and it is comforting to note that, “those that are with us are more than those that are against us” (2 Kings 6:16).

**Optional Context 1.**

ACNA Readings [when needed]

**Psalm 63:1-9, (10-12).**

**Optional Context 2.**

Further reading. [if supplied]

**Sources and Bibliography.**

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**ACNA Reading - Psalm 63**

**Introduction:** Sacred time in the Jewish tradition is historical. Feasts, holidays, and holy convocations form the yearly calendar marking events, miracles, and divine interventions that occurred in history. Epiphany marks the Messiah's theophany, God revealing Himself to the world through Jesus, beginning with the Magi's visit. This divine intervention into man's affairs by God is a historical event marked on our calendars as Epiphany. Jesus continues to reveal Himself, His mission, and plan through the calling of disciples.

**Common Theme:** The readings this Sunday share the common theme of calling. God knows His heroes. He knows their strengths and weaknesses, and He knows whom He should call for specific tasks. We all have a calling from the Lord. Paul reminds us in Romans that the “gifts and calling of the Lord are irrevocable.” God does not make a mistake when choosing or calling, nor does He take the gifts or call away. If we feel we have somehow missed our calling today, do not worry; the same call will be there tomorrow.

**Hebraic Perspective -** Receiving a calling from the Lord is not unique nor original to the Christian world. God called His heroes of old, the patriarchs, kings, and prophets, to join in and undertake the Kingdom of Heaven's work. In Jewish tradition, everyone is called to partake in the Kingdom of Heaven. Israel is called to be a light to the nations. Hence the idea of calling in Jewish tradition is usually in the collective sense, although individual Biblical heroes are often singled out for specific roles. Looking deeper at the Hebrew Bible, we also notice that God's calling does not solely rest on the Jewish people but also on Gentiles. Noah, Enoch, Job, and Cyrus are a few names that spring to mind when thinking of God's calling on the Gentile world

**Reading #1 - 1 Samuel 3:1-20:** The passage begins with the sad revelation that the “word of the Lord was rare.” The Israelites had embraced idolatry and syncretized their traditions with those of the inhabitants of the Land. Subsequently, the voice of the Lord had diminished. Thus it took time for both Samuel and Eli to recognize the calling of the Lord. Our modern-day culture, with all its false voices, can also hide God's voice from us. Perhaps that is part of the plan of the Enemy. The prophet Samuel reminds us that God does not give up; he continues to call until we hear the voice of the Lord. Verse 19 reveals a true blessing when we receive the calling of God. We will never be alone, for of Samuel it is written “The Lord was with Samuel” and the Lord will likewise be with us.

**Reading #2 - Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18:** This Psalm beautifully acknowledges the truth that God knows His heroes. “You have searched me, Lord, and you know me.” While the Psalm itself attributes David as the composer, Jewish tradition cites Adam as the original author. God knows

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us even before we were born. God knew Adam even before He created him and called Him into existence, even breathing life into him with His Spirit. We see this reflected in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians as Paul says, "He chose us before the creation of the world." It is good to acknowledge that if God calls us, it is because He knows us, and He knows that we will be up to the task for we also have His Spirit.

**Reading #3 - 1 Corinthians 6:12-20:** It appears that the Corinthians were abusing what they felt was their "freedom in Christ." Having faith in the Messiah and being saved does not give us permission to lie, cheat, or steal, or in the case of Corinth, to engage in sexual immorality. Being called by God should modify our behaviour. Part of the calling from the Lord is to have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is indeed with us, then we must maintain holiness in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Holiness and righteous behaviour are the marks of true freedom in Christ.

**Reading #4 - John 1:43-51:** All four Gospels have accounts of the disciples' callings. John's Gospel also notes that several of the first disciples were also disciples of John the Baptist, such as Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. In this passage, we have the calling of Nathanael. Interestingly Nathanael realizes and declares who Jesus is, calling Him "the son of God and King of Israel" in the first moments of actually meeting. It takes Simon Peter several years to declare the same thing. How did Nathanael arrive at the truth so quickly? Usually, we think of Nathanael sitting lazily under a fig tree absently pondering life, only to be interrupted and invited by his brother Philip to meeting Jesus. In rabbinic literature, sitting under a fig tree was a euphemism for studying the Torah. The fig tree was also a symbol of the coming Messianic Age of peace (Micah 4:4 and Zechariah 3:10). Nathanael was probably an intentional student of the Hebrew Scriptures; he was more swiftly able to recognize the voice of the Lord and the calling of the Lord than the other disciples. Nathanael is an excellent example for us of one way to recognize the Lord's voice: to be familiar with His Word. Immersing ourselves in the Scriptures will help diminish our culture's false voice and help us recognize our own calling from God more clearly.

**Hebraic Context:** Jesus tells Nathanael that he will see "heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." This reference to "ascending and descending" harkens back to the dream of Jacob's ladder. In Jewish angelology, not all angels dwell in heaven. God does have ministering angels around Him; however, angels also have tasks to perform on earth. Late Jewish tradition even goes so far as to say that behind every blade of grass is an angel whispering, "Grow grow!" Christian tradition holds that many of us, particularly children, have our own guardian angel. In the text, we note that both Jacob's vision and Jesus' declaration have the angels begin their movement by ascending and then descending.

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Thus they begin here on earth and then return to the earth. It is comforting to note that “those that are with us are more than those that are against us” (2 Kings 6:16).

### **ACNA Addendum**

**Psalm 63** - While most of the previous readings have focused on the calling of the Lord and on God seeking Man, this Psalm instead has the Psalmist seeking God. There is much in this world that distracts us from God or hides the desire for seeking the Lord. Consumerism, abundance, even blessing can diminish the desire in us to pursue the Lord. Often we have to be in a dark place to recognize the light. The Psalm is attributed to David, and David was in a dark place. Paul says that it is suffering that produces hope. While David was running for his life, pursued by evil men and with danger all around, it was then that he wrote, “I earnestly seek you.” There are protection and safety in the arms of the Lord. Our souls can and will be satisfied in the Lord. This is Good News and great hope to have.

### **About the Author:**

The Rev. Aaron Eime is the deacon at Christ Church Jerusalem and teacher for CMJ Israel. Aaron studied at the Hebrew University in the Master's program with a focus on early Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Bible. He also studied Psychology and Sociology at Queensland University in Australia. Aaron is a dedicated Bible teacher exploring the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith. He reads Aramaic and ancient Greek, is fluent in German and Hebrew, and has taught internationally including in Europe, North America, Hong Kong, and China. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and three children.