

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement

We come to worship in Jesus' name acknowledging with gratitude the land where we are gathered. This is traditional and unceded Coast Salish Territory of Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ. We continue to pray that past and present injustices can be reconciled as we commit ourselves to just and respectful relationships.

□ *Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary (repeat)*

Call to Worship

Before we were born, God knew us.

God knit us together in the womb.

God searches out our paths and tracks us along our way.

So, we praise God, for we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

There is nowhere we can go where God is not with us.

How wonderful are all God's works! Let us worship God together.

Gathering Prayer / Words of Hope

God ever creating, ever loving, ever leading, you are stillness when we are frantic – truth when we are perplexed. You give us freedom when fear takes hold – send light when we have lost our way. You are love when we feel lonely and empty – give us energy when we are ready to reach out. We praise you – Creator, Christ, Spirit – for all that you are, all that you have been, and all that you will be for us.

God of mercy and patience, you call us to follow you – offering purpose and new possibilities. Yet we confess we often hesitate. We are not sure what we have to offer. We'd prefer that someone else take the lead and maybe we will follow them. Forgive us when we hesitate. Help us trust in you and what you know we have to offer in Jesus' name. Amen

Believe the good news! God is calling each of us – giving us strength and confidence – offering forgiveness for all our sins and shortcomings. Rejoice in God's love for you this day and always.

□ *Longing for light / Christ be our light*

Prayer for Understanding

Spirit of truth and life, speak to us in the stories of Scripture today. As we listen, touch us with your Word for our lives and for the times in which we live so that we may follow in the footsteps of Christ, your Living Word. Amen

Scripture **1 Samuel 3: 1-10** [OT 247]

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.

At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; 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. Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" 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.

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."

Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. 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. 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. Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!"

And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Psalm 139: 1-6, 13-18 displayed/responsive

O LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely.

You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.

How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

I try to count them – they are more than the sand; I come to the end – I am still with you.

John 1: 43-51 [NT 92]

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.”

Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 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.”

Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

Philip said to him, “Come and see.”

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!”

Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?”

Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” 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.”

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message

This week I sent out an invitation we received from Linda Coggin at St. Andrew’s, Victoria to participate in creating a “Lenten Reader” of reflections written by members of our congregations. Each person is asked to share how their life of faith is shaped by everyday occurrences, relationships, music, art, literature, or the natural world. Maybe we would also share a favourite scripture or a short prayer. This endeavour is a way to encourage one another in our journey of faith and to build a strong sense of community. All the details are in the emailed announcements, Knox Weekly.

Initiatives like this are one of the ways we can pass on our faith to others – how good news can spread. It grows – expands – as one person tells another. And so, the Kingdom of God grows by adding people who have heard and believed the faith we share.

The reading from John’s Gospel today talks about Jesus calling Philip. Jesus found Philip and said to him, “*Follow me.*” But it also tells us that Philip was from the same

hometown as Peter and Andrew – which means that Philip already knew what kind of people Peter and Andrew were. Just the day before, Peter and Andrew became Jesus' followers. When Jesus came to Philip, he probably had already heard that Peter and Andrew were following him. That information probably had a great influence on Philip's reaction to Jesus. I mean, something must have had a profound impact because of what Philip did next! Philip immediately ran to Nathanael and said, *"We have found the one spoken of by the prophets."* And thus, Nathanael comes to meet this prophet Philip has told him about and he also decides to follow Jesus.

Jesus (God) calls Andrew and Peter.

Andrew and Peter decide to follow Jesus.

Their decision moves Philip to respond to Jesus' call.

Philip calls Nathanael. And so, on it goes...

Eventually the story comes to us, and God asks us to tell the good news to still others. Someone tells me – I tell others – they tell others still and eventually the good news grows and spreads – like an organism – a living thing. Faith is not ours to hold and hoard but something to pass on to others with joy...

Let us pray... *Holy One, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of each heart be acceptable to you – our strength and our hope. We pray that you will make us so excited by the gospel that we can't wait to tell everyone about Jesus and his love. Encourage us to pass it on... Amen*

Our Old Testament and Gospel readings this week are "call narratives," stories about individuals who receive a call from God. In First Samuel, chapter 3, a little boy named Samuel is called to become a *"trustworthy prophet of the Lord."* John's gospel tells the story of Philip and Nathanael leaving everything behind to follow Jesus when they realize that he is the one *"about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote."* Psalm 139 goes well with these two stories and relates to our own call from God. Perhaps we're not called in the same way – by a voice in the deepest night or by Jesus himself standing before us. Still, there is a powerful connection between our call from God and who we are in the depths of our being, not only our gifts and talents but also our most authentic inner life and reality.

This story of Samuel's call to be God's prophet in Israel has the flavor of an ancient folktale. Before being written down as part of the nation's religious literature, it was told and retold by one generation to another because Samuel was such a towering figure in Israel's religious and political history. The story reveals yet another instance when God was believed to have intervened to change in the direction of the nation's history. The Israelites interpreted this as another instance of God keeping the covenant made long before with Abraham and with Moses.

Many of us will know the story of Samuel... born to Hannah and her husband Elkanah. They never expected a child, for Hannah's advancing years were thought to make it impossible. Yet, to their surprise Hannah conceived and bore a child. She named him Samuel. We can just imagine the unspeakable delight in the hearts of Elkanah and Hannah – in their home and in the highlands of central Palestine. Their house would soon ring out with the sounds of a baby.

One thing Hannah always remembered is that Samuel was a gift of God. God had responded to her situation. Hannah wanted to show God how glad she was, so she chose to offer their son back to God. She dedicates him to the Lord. The couple leave their child behind at the temple in the care of the aging priest, Eli – entrusting their young son to God to use in divine service.

The story of Samuel and his parents is a touching one. Samuel never questions this unusual start to his early years. Little did Samuel realize the part he would play in God's purposes for his people. There Samuel is one night, fast asleep in the temple precincts when he is woken by a voice gently calling his name.

"Here I am," Samuel replies. Thinking the voice is Eli's, Samuel runs to the aging and almost blind priest. Eli is in for a very unsettled and oft-disrupted night!

Three times the voice calls to Samuel. Three times Samuel goes to Eli. Who else could have been calling to him? Only after the third disturbance does Eli grasp that this call comes from the voice of God. God has taken the initiative. God has chosen Samuel – confirmed him for a life of service.

Jesus also chose followers – confirmed them for service in his ministry.

John's Gospel tells of many incidents in Jesus' ministry not found in the other gospels. Some actually conflict with what the other gospels say. The way Jesus gathered his disciples is one such instance. The reason for this discrepancy is made clear in this passage. Those who followed Jesus did so solely because they were convinced that he was God's Messiah.

Certain details found in John's Gospel often give us a different view than do the accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke. The figure of Nathanael stands out in this passage as a disciple who does not appear elsewhere, yet one who obviously attracted Jesus' special attention. He remains unique. His appearance here symbolizes the pious Israelite, who – good as he is – is still incomplete. His confession that Jesus is the Son of God and King of Israel is nothing short of a full messianic declaration of faith. Despite his deeply sincere religious life and faith, he is willing to set aside intellectual doubts and difficulties to put his trust in Jesus.

Jesus had set out to gather a group of followers to assist him in his ministry. Andrew and Peter responded willingly to Jesus' call to discipleship. The next day Jesus happened to meet with Philip: *"Follow me,"* he says.

Philip responds – Jesus is the leader that Philip will follow – in part because of the recommendation of Andrew and Peter. And Philip shares his commitment and call with Nathanael – one of those who keeps themselves in the background – a low profile person – quietly getting on with his life until that fateful day when Philip caught up with him and told Nathanael that he and others had met the one spoken of by Moses and the prophets.

“Who might that be?” Nathanael may have asked.

Philip replied, *“It is Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth.”*

“Nazareth,” Nathanael scoffed, *“Nazareth? Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”* Nazareth, it seems, was not the number one place to live. We might think of it as a town with a bad rep – run-down communities, anti-social neighbours, graffiti, no decent restaurants, lousy transit, low walkability score. Nazareth? Who wants to go there? Who wants to live there?

“Come and see” Philip said to Nathanael. *“Come and see Jesus for yourself. Then you can make up your own mind. See what he is like. Have a word with him. He’s really okay you know – nothing to be afraid of. Come and see.”*

So, Nathanael went and saw. He talked with Jesus and looked with amazement, stunned at what Jesus knew about him. Nathanael found his ultra-critical attitude changing in a great moment of truth. No longer did he think of Jesus as someone who came simply from that dreadful place called Nazareth. *“Rabbi, Teacher,”* he says to Jesus, *“you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.”* That is the precise moment when Nathanael discovers the truth about who Jesus is.

God spoke to Hannah. God spoke to Samuel. God acted through Samuel.

Through Jesus, God spoke to Philip. Jesus and Philip spoke to Nathanael. Through them and their witness, God speaks to us. Through us and our witness, God continues to act.

We are told that *the word of the LORD was rare in those days – visions were not widespread*. What of our present-day spiritual atmosphere? Would we describe our current religious and secular environment as one in which God's word is not often heard and God's actions are not seen? Yet, God has not deserted those who have faith nor forgotten the purpose for the call of God's people. God continues to speak to the world, and those with faith to recognize God's call – they respond and act as God desires.

Epiphany emphasizes the divine light that has broken upon the world in Jesus Christ – takes us into the world of God's light manifest to all people – revealed to the whole world. God seizes the initiative by bringing divine inner light to the blind Eli and by using Samuel to serve Israel. God seizes the initiative by bringing divine inner light into the lives of ordinary men and using them in the ministry of Jesus. God seizes the initiative with us as we fumble and fret along life's path – as we face the problems and frustrations which the world presents and which we feel we can do nothing about. God seizes the initiative by bringing divine inner light into our lives in extraordinary and unexpected ways and inviting us to share that good news in the world. Pass it on...

Let us pray: *Creator God who names us, Gracious God who calls us, help us tune our ears to recognize your voice when you speak to our hearts. Help us discover your personal word for us – your personal demands upon us – your personal will for us. Keep calling us O God, as we work to recognize your ever-present voice in our lives. Amen*

□ *Lord, speak to me*

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Offering and Prayer

For centuries, God has called people to give their lives serving God's holy purposes. May the gifts we offer today also serve God's purposes in the church and the world, for the sake of Christ our Lord.

□ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

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God of new possibilities, in Christ you create a future for each of us, inviting us to flourish in our faith. Use us and the gifts we offer to create new possibilities for those who are uncertain about what the future holds. For we trust that you hold the future for us all. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

God of all life, each week our prayers combine with those of others in many different places. We face different challenges and yet we long for many of the same things – things you offer in your grace and mercy. Thank you for honouring all our prayers with the gift of your Spirit, so that we can find both strength and wisdom to serve you.

Today we remember before you people living face to face with war and violence, in places where hatred has been stirred up and fear stalks people on their own streets. We pray for all those displaced by conflict – seeking refuge among us or in camps and communities around the world. God, speak to us a word of peace and embrace us with your love.

We remember before you people struggling in these uncertain economic times, those who have lost their jobs or worry about making ends meet. God, speak to us a word of reassurance and embrace us with your love.

We remember before you people facing discrimination and social prejudice every day – those who are bullied at school, at work or at home, and those who are made ashamed of who they are. God, speak to us a word of dignity and embrace us with your love.

We remember before you people facing illness and suffering in their lives or in the lives of those they love – those struggling with disability and lack of access or needed resources and those who know grief or anxiety. God, speak to us a word of healing and embrace us with your love.

We remember before you your whole creation and its many vulnerable facets and faces. Teach us how to care for the world you love so we may live together wisely. God, speak to us a word of wisdom and embrace us with your love as we join our voices to pray... ***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, for ever. Amen***

□ ***Will you come and follow me***

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Blessing

May we go from here continuing to listen for the voice of Jesus and following where he leads. God be with you – speaking through you. Christ Jesus be one with you – raising you to life. The Divine Spirit dwell within you and make you holy. Amen

□ ***Send me, Lord / Thuma mina***

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