

Happy New Year!!!

We all celebrate the coming of the new year, some with fear and trepidation, some with pure joy over the end of the last year, some with hope for new things coming, and everything in between. I think good examples of that are stories in my own life right now. My son (who is in the Navy) and his family are moving back to the states this summer and in one week he received his orders, they found and bought a house that is perfect for them and she has been offered a job. At the same time I was told of the tragic death of the son of a dear friend. How do we balance the things that life throws at us. The joy and the sorrow seem so very diametrically opposed it is sometimes hard to believe that God is in the midst of all of it. Each year is a new beginning and this reminds us that each day is a new beginning. And that is one reason we are here in this church worshiping together. we know that life is full of joy and all kinds of sorrow and adversity, but we know that God is always there to walk beside us as we go through it.

Our old testament lesson today is one of my favorite pieces of scripture. I love the picture it paints for us. the elder Eli has Samuel living in his house as a student to be mentored for service to God. Eli is an old man and his vision is becoming dim. Samuel is a youth moving into a new life. When Samuel is called to by God, but... he does not understand where the voice is coming from. How many of us would be in the same situation? If you heard a voice calling to you in the night would you think it was God? Would you think you were just dreaming? Would you even pay attention, thinking you were just hearing things? Our reading shows us that those days seem to be similar to ours: " The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not

widespread." But are they? how many of us think we have heard God or heard some kind of word in our lives that we feel came from God? Do we share that with others? I think most of us tend to keep that sort of thing to ourselves so we don't look like some kind of kook or zealot. or perhaps we are afraid we are wrong.

At another church we had a study session where we talked about that sort of thing. People shared things they never really told out loud before; faith stories that showed God was and had been active in their lives. One such story was told by a woman in her 80' s. When she was a schoolgirl, she was walking home from school and she suddenly felt like someone had put their hand on her shoulder and whispered to her that everything will be OK. She had no idea why she would experience such a thing until she got home and was told her father had been tragically killed that afternoon. She carried that reassuring moment with her the rest of her life.

Our scripture today is filled with that kind of reassurance. the youth hearing the voice of God;

in our psalm it says:

2 You trace my journeys and my resting-places \*  
and are acquainted with all my ways.

3 Indeed, there is not a word on my lips, \*  
but you, O LORD, know it altogether.

4 You press upon me behind and before \*  
and lay your hand upon me.

Our Gospel states: " 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!”

That reassurance helps to show us the balance between the good and the bad times. It weighs in to help keep us close to God.

Here is a quote from the poem "The Snow Geese" by Mary Oliver :

"Oh, to love what is lovely, and will not last!

What a task

to ask

of anything, or anyone,

yet it is ours,

and not by the century or the year, but by the hours. "

I wonder how Nathanael felt at the time of the Crucifixion? I wonder how all Jesus followers felt at that time. Did they feel as we do when we lose a loved one, or our life changes for the worse for no obvious reason. Through the resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit Jesus passes us that reassurance that God is with us always:" and not by the century or the year, but by the hours. "

The wife of Marcus Borg shared this story: "In his travels throughout the country he was often asked: Marcus the world is in such trouble and turmoil it is all so overwhelming. It seems too much sometimes, how are we to make a difference? Marcus stated: consider the patchwork quilt. Figure out what is yours to do and do that. Do your part, do your patch and together we can create something that is more than we could have imagined or done alone."

God is always there for us.

I cannot believe that Lent will soon be upon us. Ash Wednesday is just a month away. During Lent this year I would like us to share our faith stories with each other. I don't mean that we sit and recite things from our lives...but to write a faith story that shows God's reassuring Grace in our own experience of life. The story can be written anonymously but we will place them on the bulletin board in the parish hall to share with each other. God **is** active in our lives. God's reassurance is there in the joys and the sorrows. Let's not wait until we can no longer remember or write our own stories that glorify God. Let us create our own Patchwork quilt of God's reassurance. I think we can all be like Nathanael and be somewhat amazed by Jesus as we say: "“Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

In sharing those stories we continue the building of God's kingdom. We add to the stories of people like Nathanael and Samuel and the disciples and even our own ancestors. We are more than a Sunday meeting. We are more than a building. We are Gods children in this place.

Let us all join in rereading our collect for today: Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshipped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

