

1 Samuel 3:1-10
John 1:43-51

SEEING AND BEING SEEN

I heard a good story this past week that I thought I would pass on to you. The boss of the company called the home of one of his employees. A little boy answered the phone and, in a whisper, said, "Hello." The boss said, "Is your father there and may I speak to him?" The little boy whispered, "He's here but you can't speak to him." "Well then, is your mother there?" The boy whispered, "Yes." "May I please speak to her?" "No," the boy said very quietly. Then the boss heard some crying on the other end of the line. He said, "What's going on over there? Why can't I talk to you dad or mom?" The boy whispered, "They're busy talking to the police right now." "The police?" "What's going on?" Just then, the boss heard a loud noise on the other end of the phone. "What's that noise?" The little boy whispered, "It's a helicopter landing outside on our lawn; it brought the S.W.A.T. team and they are talking to the rescue squad." The boss had had enough; he said, "Young man, I demand to know what's going on. I want some answers! What is happening over at your house?" The little boy whispered, "Everyone is looking for me because I'm hiding!"

That story reminds us of the wonderful truth found throughout scripture that, no matter how much we try to hide from God, God will find us. In fact, God is already there ahead of us, so when we run away from God – wherever we go – we run right into God's loving and outstretched arms because God has gotten there first and is waiting for us.

Even more to the point, God takes the initiative and comes looking for us. God seeks and finds those who are lost. We may try our very best to hide from God but God loves us with a love that refuses to let go. After all, we are called and claimed by God, who bids us to "Come and see," and who then sends us so that we can be seen doing God's work out in the world.

In the Old Testament lesson, the young boy, Samuel, was serving in the temple of the Lord under the tutelage of the elderly priest, Eli. Night had fallen and both Eli and Samuel were asleep. Three times, the Lord (Yahweh) called out to Samuel and, each time, Samuel went to Eli to see what the old priest needed or wanted. After the third interruption, Eli perceived that it was the Lord who was calling to Samuel. He told Samuel to go back to bed and, if he heard his name called once more, Samuel was supposed to answer, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." God spoke once more. Samuel got up to see what was going on. He spoke as Eli had instructed him, he listened, and then he was sent out to be seen and to serve on Yahweh's behalf. In time, Samuel ruled Israel at the end of the period of the judges and he anointed the first two kings.

In the New Testament lesson, Jesus was in the midst of calling the twelve disciples. Jesus was in Galilee and there he found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." In turn, Philip told Nathanael all about Jesus the son of Joseph from Nazareth. Nathanael wasn't impressed at first for he wondered aloud if anything good could come out of Nazareth, which was a small, secluded village. To his credit, when Philip invited him to "Come and see," Nathanael did just that. He came to Jesus to see for himself if Jesus were the One about whom Moses in the law and the prophets wrote.

Through a quick exchange with Jesus, Nathanael came, he saw, and he was conquered by

divine love. Nathanael quickly moved from addressing Jesus as Rabbi (or Teacher), to “Son of God,” and on to “You are the King of Israel!” Nathanael began with a mere formality, and then moved into a theological confession, which resulted in his own personal commitment. Nathanael’s growing involvement with Jesus led him to say basically, “You will be Son of God in my life, and you are the King of this Israelite.” Nathanael answered the call of Christ to be one of his twelve disciples. In turn, Jesus promised him that what was in store for him in terms of his relationship with God would make Jacob’s vision of the angels ascending and descending on the ladder between heaven and earth pale in comparison. Nathanael came to see what all of the fuss was about; and from then on, Nathanael was seen serving in the presence of the Lord. In the scripture lessons for today, there is movement from one stage of growth to the next. Both Samuel and Nathanael displayed a willingness to be still and listen; both of them heeded the call to “come and see,” and both of them were told to “go and do” – they were sent out to be seen doing the Lord’s work. And down through the ages, the torch of faithful commitment has been passed from one generation and many disciples to the next. If we too are desirous to grow in our relationship with the Lord, and in our faith and service, we must heed the calling to see and be seen.

Dr. William Barclay said that there is a rhythm to the Christian life; we leave the world out there and we enter into the presence of the Lord. Then, after some time, we leave the presence of God and we reenter the world, there to serve in the name of the Lord. That rhythm of moving back and forth – between the One who created, redeemed, and sustains us to the places where we are called to serve – is a continuous motion in our lives that leads to both spiritual growth and fulfillment.

I recently read something that really spoke to me. Do you remember Holman Hunt’s famous painting of Jesus standing outside the door of the believer’s heart and knocking? The original painting hangs in St. Paul’s Cathedral in London but I remember seeing that picture on a wall of my home church in St. Louis when I was a small child. Most people think that the painting is based on Jesus’ words in Revelation 3:20 – “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.” While those words are the source of inspiration for Holman Hunt’s painting, Peter Gomes has suggested that it’s the other way around. Jesus is inviting us to come out and go with him, to be seen with him working along side of the Lord and one another in doing God’s will here on earth. (Lectionary Homiletics, January 2009, p. 60)

In the early 1960s, at the height of the civil rights movement, a group of white ministers issued a public statement urging Dr. Martin Luther King, in the name of Christian faith, to be more patient in his quest for justice and to relax the relentless struggle for civil rights. Dr. King’s response came in the form of the famous “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” In the letter, Dr. King indicated that he had received similar requests for delay, indeed, that he had just gotten a letter from “a white brother in Texas” who wrote, “...It is possible you are in too great a religious hurry... The teachings of Christ take time to come to earth.” Dr. King replied that such an attitude stemmed from a sad misunderstanding of time, the notion that time cures all ills. Time, Dr. King argued, could be used for good or for evil. Human progress, he said, is not inevitable, but rather... it comes through the tireless efforts of (people) willing to be coworkers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation. We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right.” (Pulpit Resource, January

16, 1994, p. 14)

Along those same lines but on a lighter note, there is the story of the little girl who had only one line in the Christmas play, "I am the light of the world." She rehearsed and she rehearsed some more, but, struck with stage fright on the night of the pageant, she forgot her line! Her mother, sitting in the audience, slowly and carefully mouthed the words out for her, "I am the light of the world." Reading her mother's lips, the girl announced loudly, "My mother is the light of the world!" (John A. Stroman)

In a very real sense, we are all reflections of the One true light that shines in the world, which the darkness cannot overcome. It is through the lives of real people that we see and hear the story of God's redeeming grace. We too come and see Jesus – through worship, Sunday school and Bible study, Christian fellowship – and we grow in our faith and our relationship with him. Then, we go out into the world in order to be seen reflecting his light in the hope that others will come and see Jesus and join with us in offering his ministry of compassionate service to others. Seeing Jesus and being seen with him and those in need to whom he sends us – that's what it's really all about – to the glory of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Randall C. Stevens

First Presbyterian Church/Martinsville, VA

January 18, 2009