**1 Samuel 3:1-20**

**2 Corinthians 4:5-12**

**Mark 2:23-3:6**

I ordered a book this week entitled, *Lessons from the Light: What We Can Learn from the Near-Death Experience.[[1]](#footnote-1)* I ordered it because some therapists claim[[2]](#footnote-2) that just by hearing or reading about near-death experiences we can harness some of the same benefits as those who have had these experiences. This includes an awareness of an infinite and universal Love that holds us and that *is* us. Furthermore this awareness isn’t fleeting for those people who have touched death. It abides.

That’s something I would call a fairly significant degree of union with God: awareness of infinite and universal Love; abiding in and with Love. Union with God is something I desire. So do you or else you’d be somewhere other than church right now. And so we turn to our sacred text – Holy Scripture – because it is a series of case studies of those, like us, who have yearned to know God.

Today’s case study from the First Book of Samuel shows how this young boy began his deep life in God and union with God. One of the first things we notice is the persistence of the Divine Life in seeking him. The voice of God called Samuel four times in this passage. It is with this same persistence that God seeks us. The voice of God calls us uncountable times. That call; that loving voice never goes away. We can certainly close our ears. We can become experts at avoiding and ignoring. But Love ever beckons us.

The next thing we notice is that God has some fairly unpleasant things to tell Samuel about his master and teacher, Eli. Well isn’t that great! Here I am; longing for this spiritual life; God grants it; and the very first thing I get is an indictment against the one who is my father-figure. This is my dear companion and mentor. We share mutual affection; besides: I am utterly reliant upon him for my livelihood and sustenance. Don’t tell me anything bad about him!

This is a telling lesson about the spiritual life. We see it most obviously after the resurrection. Jesus tells Peter that the time is coming when he will be taken by others where he does not wish to go.[[3]](#footnote-3) In the book of Acts we see the disciple Philip performing a roadside baptism for a man from Ethiopia and “when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

This is what we sign up for when we long for a life deep in spirit: Less of me and more of God. This means vulnerability and openness. It means being willing to think in ways that you have never thought before……to accept things you would really rather reject. It means profound trust. Philip didn’t get an itinerary when he was snatched away. But he was already so compliant with God’s ways that there was absolutely no resistance to whatever that next piece of his journey would be.

In Samuel’s story, the passage says that just after the Divine Voice speaks, “Samuel laid there until morning” and then got up. He just laid there. Wide awake. He probably didn’t move a muscle.

Now it is morning and Eli demands to know what Samuel knows. I realize you don’t have the text in front of you but in it, God never tells Samuel what to do with the information he’s been given. God has simply announced to the boy: “See, I am about to do something in Israel.”

It is the circumstance of Samuel’s life – the position that he is in; the family he is in – that requires something of him now – but only because he has this new life in God. This is the moment of transformation. This is when Samuel is forever changed. This is when he becomes a partner with God; a co-creator with God. Because Samuel decides what to do. He decides to reveal God’s words to Eli. God has led him to this point; this decision. But God hasn’t told Samuel what to do. The decision is Samuel’s alone.

When we move into this place of union with God, the circumstances of our lives, like Samuel’s, will make new demands on us. That we never could have imagined. We gaze upon the setting of our lives and see things differently. We see where love is lacking. We see where people are suffering. We see where God longs to go, to bring new life; hope; renewal. And we see that we are the ones who must respond.

When our lives become cracked open like a coconut, God’s love can flow freely in and freely out. We don’t have to worry about manufacturing this love. We could never do that anyway. We just don’t naturally have enough of the stuff to share. Love is gift that’s given; received; and then given away again. And in the process, we eventually *become* Love. We don’t become perfect; we still make mistakes. But we move from our humanness – which at best is *loving* – to a different way of being; a different order of consciousness. We become Love. It is a spiritual transformation but it occurs only when we conform to this pattern of receive, give, receive again.

Scientists like to point out that the River Jordan flows into two different land-locked seas in the Middle East. It flows into the Sea of Galilee and back out; and about one hundred miles later it flows into the Dead Sea but not back out again. The Dead Sea is a limited drainage basin that retains water and allows no outflow to other sources like a river or ocean.

As a consequence, the Dead Sea is so named because it cannot support life – neither fish nor plant – because of its salinity. It is ten times more salty than the ocean. By contrast its cousin to the north, the Sea of Galilee, is not a salt-water body. It is a freshwater lake which for millennia has provided fish for fisherman and recreational opportunities for others. The only difference between the two seas is that one receives and gives; the other receives and keeps.

We are no different from the seas. To flourish we must continually receive new and fresh blessings from God and pass them on. To stop receiving, or to stop passing on what we’ve been given, is to become like the salty Dead Sea.

Our case study of Samuel in the Old Testament today tells of one who heard God’s voice calling him directly. We have other case studies like this: Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, and Mary, just to name a few. They made themselves available to God and they were changed. Their life purposes were given by God, but probably not what any of them were hoping for. Instead, the call is something they could not have asked for or even imagined. But once accepting it, they – in co-creation with God – transformed the world.

We’re entering a time of imagination this summer at Nativity because summer is the time for day dreaming and imaging new things. Can you imagine becoming Love? What in the world would it be like to be snatched away by God’s Spirit? It takes a playful attitude to imagine new possibilities and you just have to do things differently sometimes to become more playful, creative and imaginative.

So we have two different items in our worship liturgy today. One is a different creed and one is a fraction anthem. Instead of the Nicene Creed or Apostle’s Creed, we will use Canticle 21 from Morning Prayer for a while. It is not an official creed of the church but it is creedal in content and beautifully poetic.

We will also sing a fraction anthem during the Eucharistic Prayer. The fraction occurs when the priest breaks the bread and says, *Alleluia: Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.* And the people respond with *Therefore let us keep the feast: Alleluia*.

Right after that we’ll sing the fraction anthem in your worship booklet at the bottom of page three. Let’s try it out now so we’ll be ready.

1. By Kenneth Ring, 2006, Moment Point Press; Needham, MA [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See “Linn Ministries,” a project dedicated to psychological, emotional healing: http://www.linnministries.org/new-page/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. John 21:18 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Acts 8:39 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)