

# This Week's Scripture - Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> January 2021

**1 Samuel 3.1-10 (11-20); Psalm 139.1-6, 13-18; 1 Corinthians 6.12-20; John 1.43-51; Luke 14.14-30**

**1 Samuel 3.1-10:** The boy Samuel was the son of Elkanah and Hannah, a long-wanted child promised to Hannah by God after she prayed that she would conceive, and she dedicated him to the Lord. Samuel was raised in the temple at Shiloh and ministered under the priest Eli. Samuel was sleeping in the room where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, and he heard a voice call his name. He went to Eli three times, and on the third time, Eli recognized that it was God calling the boy's name, and he told Samuel to respond to God that he was listening. When God called Samuel's name a fourth time, Samuel listened. God told Samuel what he was going to do, that it would make the ears of those who heard it "tingle." God's judgment would come down on the house of Eli because his sons did not follow God's ways. Samuel was afraid to tell Eli, but Eli told him not to be afraid, because if it came from God, he should not hide it. So, Samuel told Eli what God had spoken to him about Eli's sons, and Eli understood. Samuel listened to God and told others what God told him, and thus became a prophet for God.

**Psalm 139** is an intimate prayer to God. The psalmist writes poetically of how deeply God knows them, how wonderful God is, and how God is far too wondrous for the psalmist to grasp. It is God who knitted the psalmist in their mother's womb, God who knows their inmost thoughts. God is the one who knows our beginnings and endings. God is beyond our understanding, and the psalmist cannot begin to comprehend the thoughts of God.

**1 Corinthians 6.12-20:** The Epistle reading follows 1 Corinthians for the next few weeks. In 6:12-20, Paul writes of the body as a temple for the Holy Spirit, and how we care for ourselves and care for our relationships with others is also how we care for God within us. Paul specifically writes of the social context of the city of Corinth, where temple prostitution was common among Greeks. In contrast, for Christians, the temple is our body. We honour God by caring for those we are in sexual relationships with as well as ourselves. Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 about two becoming one flesh. In Paul's view, those who engage in relations with the temple prostitutes are not caring for their temple for the Holy Spirit: their body. They are worshiping other gods in their sexual relationships.

**John 1.34-51:** John is the only gospel that mentions the disciple Nathanael, and in 1:43-51, he follows Jesus, but only after some persuasion. At first Philip answers the call to follow Jesus, and then Philip finds Nathanael and tells him that he's found the Messiah, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth. But Nathanael asks the famous question, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" A small backwater Galilean town was not where one would normally go looking for a Messiah. But Philip persuades him, and when Nathanael approaches Jesus, Jesus knows there's no fooling him. Jesus tells Nathanael he saw him under the fig tree before Philip called him, and Nathanael believes, proclaiming "Rabbi, you are the son of God!" Jesus asks him if he believes because Jesus told him, and that he will see greater things than these. Jesus then alludes to the image of heaven that their ancestor Jacob beheld, of angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

**Luke 4.14-30:** Jesus preaches in his hometown synagogue reading from the scroll of Isaiah, chapter 61. When Jesus declares the Good News has been proclaimed and fulfilled in their hearing, those in the synagogue spoke well of him. They were proud that this was Joseph's son, someone they knew. But then Jesus changes the tune. He knows they would want him to perform the same miracles he performed elsewhere to prove to them who he was. He declared that no prophet would be accepted in their hometown. Elijah was sent not to the widows of Israel, but the widow in Zarephath. There were many lepers in Israel, but Elisha healed Naaman the Syrian. And when Jesus' neighbours heard this, these examples that Jesus used to show how God turned to outsiders, they turned from praise to rage. They drove him out of town and wanted to throw him off a cliff, but Jesus managed to pass through them, and went on his way.

**Reflection:** In the United States, this is Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Sunday. We do well to remember not only Dr. King's famous "I Have A Dream" speech, but also his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," and countless other letters and sermons. Like Jesus in Luke 4, often white Christians want to hear what Dr. King had to say when it is easy. When it is hard, white Christians tend to dismiss or ignore his teachings. Like the prophets before him, Dr. King called out for justice—which is good news for the poor, marginalized and oppressed, but not so good for those in power. Prophets have honour except in their hometown—or when they speak truth to power.

## Praying with others or alone...

### Call to Worship

God hears the cries of the oppressed;

**Speak to us, O God, so we may listen.**

God notices the plight of the hungry and homeless;

**Call to us, O God, to take notice.**

God knows the struggles of the imprisoned;

**Open our hearts, O God, to Your mercy and justice.**

God speaks to us, calling us by name,

**And we are listening, O God; ready to do Your will.**

*The spirit of the Lord has been given to me,  
for he has anointed me. He has sent me  
to bring the good news to the poor, to pro-  
claim liberty to captives and to the blind  
new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to  
proclaim the Lord's year of favour.*

### Prayer of Brokenness / Confession

God of Justice and Mercy,

we confess that privilege allows us to not recognize the plight of those around us.

We confess that the assumptions we have from our experiences  
shade how we view the struggles of others.

We judge based on what we know, instead of learning from others views and understandings.

Forgive us when we unintentionally cause harm by our assumptions and fail to recognize the ways others  
are oppressed by our actions, words, and most importantly, by our silent indifference.

Call us into repentance and accountability.

Help us to listen to the prophets of old as well as the prophets among us today.

Guide us into thoughtful action to change our ways

and dismantle the systems of oppression that we live in.

In Jesus' name, who lived and died for us, and lives again, breaking the chains of sin and death, we pray.

Amen.

### Assurance of Forgiveness / Blessing

Hagar, long ago, named God the God Who Sees.

God sees us and knows our struggles.

God takes notice of us, as God took notice of the Hebrews under Pharaoh's rule,

and God hears our cries of oppression. God knows where the sin of the world weighs us down.

When we turn back to God, God forgives our sins.

When we work to dismantle the systems of oppression in the world, we work to undo the power of sin.

It is an act of repentance. It is hard work, but it is Godly work.

Let God work in your hearts, and may God work in us as we work for justice, restoration,  
and healing in this world.

Go with this good news: God loves you, God sees you, God knows you.

God is working in you, and forgives you, and calls you into God's ways. Amen.

### Prayer

God of the Prophets,

stir in us Your prophetic voice, manifesting Yourself in the gifts You have given us.

Help us to be prophetic teachers, leaders, caretakers, artists and creatives.

Call us to be prophetic parents, aunts and uncles and grandparents, coaches and aides.

Guide us to be prophetic in our workplaces when we witness injustice.

May we be prophetic in whatever work we are in,  
and may our work empower us to do Your work.

Help us to live prophetically to proclaim Your Good News for the oppressed,

to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim release to the captives, as Isaiah and Jesus spoke long ago.

Stir in us, O God, so that we might live out Your call to love, justice, mercy, and peace.

Amen.