

THE VOICE OF THE PROPHET

Sermon for the 2nd Sunday after the Epiphany, 2018

John 1:43-51

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel from before, John 1:43-51: ⁴³ **The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip. Jesus told him, “Follow Me!”**

⁴⁴ **Philip was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the One about whom Moses wrote in the Law and about whom the prophets also wrote — Jesus, Joseph’s son from Nazareth.”**

⁴⁶ **Nathanael asked him, “Nazareth — can anything good come from there?”**

Philip told him, “Come and see!”

⁴⁷ **Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him. He said about him, “Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is no deceit.”**

⁴⁸ **Nathanael asked Him, “Where did You get to know me?”**

Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”

⁴⁹ **Nathanael answered Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel.”**

⁵⁰ **Jesus answered him, “You believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.”**

⁵¹ **Then He told him, “Truly, truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God going up and coming down on the Son of Man.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

There is no doubt silence can be bliss – parents who spend their time with noisy children know what I mean, and yet, silence is not always comfortable. Again, sticking with children, if you have small children, you know that if they are in another room making a noise, then all of a sudden it falls silent, it’s usually because they are up to no good! Silence can be a good thing, but then again it can be uncomfortable.

When Malachi the prophet died, the Word of the LORD fell silent. No longer was the prophetic Word of the LORD to be heard spoken through a living prophet. There was no one on whom the Spirit of the LORD had come to rest. The tongues of the prophets were stilled, and the Word of the LORD was silent for four hundred years.

Imagine, then, how the people of God must have felt when it all fell silent. After many years of speaking through prophets, the voice of God was now silent. Four hundred years is

a long time to say nothing.

There have been times when all of us have been alone with our thoughts. Sometimes it can be soothing. But if silence goes on too long, it can be devastating to the mind and heart. Lack of communication can destroy marriages, it can ruin friendships, and can end your career very quickly. It must have been terrible for the people of God. Where was the living voice of God? Where are His prophets? What's become of God and His promises? If God is now silent, then what's my hope? Are His promises still good? Has God abandoned us? It was a terrible, godly silence.

Then at just the right time, the voice was back. The silence of the prophets was shattered. From the wilderness and barren regions, the voice of one came just as Isaiah had foretold. ³ *A voice of someone calling out in the wilderness: "Prepare a road for the LORD! Make a smooth highway in the desert for our God!"* ⁴ *Every valley must be raised up and every mountain and hill must be levelled! The uneven land must become a plain and the rugged ground must become a plain!"* (Is 40:3-4). It's the preaching of John that prepares the way. John's message echoed the call of all the Old Testament prophets. To "*prepare a road for the LORD*" and to "*make a smooth highway in the desert for our God*" was essentially a description of the repentance John called for. Just as the road would be smoothed and straightened and levelled for an approaching monarch, so John's listeners were to clear away everything that would be an obstacle to Christ's coming to them. It was like saying, "Christ is coming. Drop everything and get ready to welcome Him!" Everything Moses and the prophets said is to come is coming to pass right now. Don't miss this! Hold on! Get ready!

With fire and Holy Spirit power, the Messiah comes, but instead of being a terrible judge, awesome to behold, He's a lamb. "*Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" John says.¹ The Messiah, with gentleness, heals and teaches. In lowliness, the Messiah calls disciples and raises the dead to life. Gentiles will follow Him; sinners adore him; little children call Him "Son of David." The Messiah of God loves the lame, the mute, the seeing, and the blind. In humility, this Messiah touches lepers and washes feet. More than that, Jesus is that Lamb of God who came to give Himself as the sacrifice to win forgiveness for a sinful world. He is the Passover Lamb whose blood saves us from death.² He is the lamb of the daily offering,³ the burnt offering - "without defect"⁴ - the peace offering.⁵ He is the sin offering through which we receive forgiveness.⁶ As Isaiah

¹ John 1:29

² Exodus 12:1-3

³ Exodus 29:38-41

⁴ Leviticus 1:10

⁵ Leviticus 3:6-7

prophesied, “*He was led like a lamb to the slaughter,*” (53:7).

To be the Lamb of God means to be lowly and gentle and humble to the point of death, even death on a cross.

We need that Lamb. In this world where death lords over us, we sinners long for that gentle Lamb, who is also our Good Shepherd, because the enemy stalks us with cold efficiency. From the moment we’re born, the enemy is doing his evil best to turn us into a spiritual corpse. Satan’s purpose is to fill your soul with darkness and make sin seem like the good, right, and noble thing to do. When this happens, we ignore the importance of God’s Word for our faith. We ignore our neighbours, turn against them, whisper against them, and generally treat one another as if they were not someone for whom Christ died. When I sin and when you sin in this and every other way we can possibly dream up, we offend God and His holiness. Yes, our sins are no small thing; they’re a personal offense against God! There’s no nice way to say it: Sin is a God-sized problem, and you and I are nowhere near big enough to solve it. If we understand anything at all, we cover our mouths in silence.

After all those centuries of silence, after our own penitential silence, we now hear the new voice of the Prophet, of *the* Prophet, the voice of God, Jesus of Nazareth. John had pointed to Him, told us to listen to Him, and now Jesus’ own voice shatters the silence.

After all those centuries of silence, some knew they needed to hear Him. Immediately before our text, we find Jesus inviting Andrew to follow Him. Then we see Andrew inviting his brother Simon. Andrew said to Simon, “*We have found the Messiah*” (*which means Christ*), (John 1:41). When Simon was brought to Jesus, he heard Jesus call him by a new name, Peter, and Peter followed. Then Jesus called to Philip, “**Follow Me!**” - and Philip did.

Philip heard, and Philip understood.⁴⁵ **Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the One about whom Moses wrote in the Law and about whom the prophets also wrote — Jesus, Joseph’s son from Nazareth.”** Identifying the Old Testament with the Law of Moses and the prophets, Philip based his faith on the sure words of Scripture. He shared the conviction of Andrew and Simon that Jesus was the one foreshadowed, typified, and promised by God in the Old Testament. The long-promised Messiah has come to the world and shattered the silence of the prophets. This is the one of whom Moses had said, “*Listen to Him*” in Deuteronomy 18. Speaking through the prophet Jeremiah, the LORD had said, “*The days are coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,*” (Jeremiah 31:31). In Jesus, that promised new covenant will come to pass on the night of His betrayal. Isaiah foretells of His suffering,⁷ and Nathan tells

⁶ Leviticus 4:32-35

⁷ Isaiah 53

David that His kingdom will be forever.⁸

“*Repent! For the kingdom of heaven has come near,*” (Matt. 3:2). This is the prophetic proclamation of the Son of God. With the incarnation of God and the revealing Epiphany light, the Messiah, Christ Jesus, invades the world, and the kingdom of the enemy has no chance. This invasion of God is one where the only cry is that of a baby being born. There are no huge machines of war, but rather a tiny hand that grasps the hands of His mother and father. No uniforms with medals and general’s stars, but rather strips of common cloth to swaddle a newborn and a bright, single star to light the way for travellers bearing gifts for a king.

The silence of heaven is broken with Jesus’ infant cries, and John’s recognising Him as the Lamb to be slain. Christ will save those who trust in Him, just as Moses and the prophets said. He will save them by dying for them. We cannot fully comprehend the wonder and majesty of the Baby in the manger unless we embrace the truth that He is revealed to be the Man on the cross for us sinners. On that hill called Calvary, it looked as if Satan had won the battle. The Messiah was wounded and nailed. The Son of Mary looked to the sky and shouted, “*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*” (Mark 15:34), but received no reply.

Then on the third day, the silence of heaven was shattered. It was broken by the sound of an earthquake. The silence was broken with the announcement of an angel, “*He is not here, for He has risen,*” (Matt. 28:6). Death and grave were no match for this Lamb, this Saviour, this Christ. He is ours, and He is for us forever.

After all the centuries of silence, some eagerly hear, “**We have found the One about whom Moses wrote in the Law and about whom the prophets also wrote — Jesus, Joseph’s son from Nazareth,**” and they rejoice. But others will still doubt and answer like Nathanael: “**Nazareth — can anything good come from there?**”

Nathanael was not greatly impressed by Philip’s enthusiastic, “**we have found.**” He voices his doubt. Philip had just declared that he and the others had found the greatest possible good thing, the Messiah Himself. Nathanael knew of no scriptural prophecy linking the Messiah with Nazareth. A back hills town like Nazareth of Galilee - how could it figure in something as important as the Messiah? If nothing good is to be expected out of Nazareth, how can the greatest good originate there? Like Nathanael, do we too sometimes have a dubious and doubting spirit?

Nevertheless, **Philip told him, “Come and see!”**

⁴⁷ **Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him. He said about him, “Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is no deceit.”**

⁸ 2 Samuel 7:12-13

⁴⁸ **Nathanael asked Him, “Where did You get to know me?”**

Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”

⁴⁹ **Nathanael answered Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel.”**

Under the hot Mediterranean sun, people commonly sought the refreshing shade of a fig tree, where they meditated and prayed (see 1 Kings 4:25; Micah 4:4). It was not necessarily a momentous revelation for Jesus to have placed Nathanael under a fig tree. Given Nathanael’s reaction, however, clearly Jesus, by identifying the place and time, also knew the subject of Nathanael’s meditation and prayer. Had he been praying for the Chosen One of Israel to come? Was he meditating on his soul’s eternal well-being? Had he asked to see the fulfillment of God’s prophecies? Whatever it was, Jesus knew.

These words from Jesus were the key for Nathanael. They clearly connected Jesus with the confession of Philip as the One about whom Moses and the prophets had written. What Moses preached and what the prophets declared is the final, ultimate, and eternal *yes* to all God’s promises. Nathanael believed and confessed, **“Rabbi, You are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel.”**

When Jesus was born, Magi from the east came to pay honour to *“the One who has been born king of the Jews,”* (Matthew 2:2). The writer of the messianic second psalm quoted God Himself, saying, *“I have installed My King on Zion”* and then, *“You are My Son”* (verses 6-7; see also Psalm 110; Micah 5:2; 2 Samuel 7:12-16). Now that King, God’s own Son, stood before Nathanael, and Nathanael knew it was He.

Jesus’ own voice promised Nathanael, **“Truly, truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God going up and coming down on the Son of Man.”** No doubt Jesus was here alluding unmistakably to Jacob’s dream at Bethel when he fled from the anger of Esau,⁹ now Jesus offered an open heaven as the greater thing He had to give Nathanael and the others. Yes, He was **“the Son of God.”** Yes, He was **“the King of Israel,”** and as such He was the only way to get to heaven. In his dream Jacob had seen the angels of God ascending and descending on a stairway that reached from earth to heaven. “I,” Jesus was saying, “am the stairway that links heaven and earth.”

While Nathanael saw Him, correctly, as **“the Son of God,”** and **“the King of Israel,”** we must also not forget that He is **“the Son of Man.”**

As the Son of Man He lived the perfect life the rest of us fail to live and died the death we deserve to die. As the Son of Man He came to win the forgiveness of sins for all people, not just for Israel. And He has.

All history of heaven and earth comes to its apex in Jesus Christ, our Lord, **the Son of**

⁹ Genesis 28:12

God, the King of Israel, and the Son of Man. The Child of Bethlehem, bathed in Epiphany light, redeems you and me. That same call of Jesus, “**Follow Me!**” still rings out today. We trust in Him, and He has saved us by grace alone through faith. Repent and believe the Good News! The silence of heaven is shattered! Jesus has come, and He will come again! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Almighty and ever-living God, You have given the light of Your truth in Jesus Christ that we may be rescued from the darkness of sin and unbelief, and have life in His name. We thank You that You have made us alive through faith in Him, and lavished on us so many gifts of Your grace. Grant that we may treasure in our hearts the truth that Jesus, Your unique Son, is our revealer of Your will, our sacrificial Lamb, our Messiah, our King, and the Son of Man, who was rejected, crucified, and rose again for us.

Heavenly Father, make us who are Your people shining lights in this world’s darkness. Send out preachers and teachers of Your Word, that many more may know Your mercy and love in the gift of Your Son and His Gospel of grace and forgiveness. Strengthen all of us in the fellowship of Your Church to join hands in love and zeal to do the work set before us. We praise you for Your various spiritual gifts. Grant that we may use them for the common good of the members of Christ’s body. Make us loyal in serving our Lord, patient in every trouble, and joyful in our promised hope. Make us eager to hold on to what is good, to help our fellow Christians, and be ready to share with all people in need. Free us from the deceptive designs of Satan and every kind of falsehood, and give us the ability to distinguish false spirits. Grant that we who have been called out of darkness into Christ’s marvellous light may in this way proclaim His saving love and power.

Bestow a special measure of Your grace on our homes. May they be places of unity, peace, and learning. Give parents the ability to teach their children in Your ways, and give children the ability to listen to what their parents teach.

Give stability, peace, and tranquillity to the nations of the earth. Deliver people everywhere from famine, disease, fire, flood, storm, earthquake, and every danger. In every test that You send, help all people to lift up their eyes to You, and to know Your power and care.

We ask Your mercy on all who are in any special need of body or soul. Show them the comfort of Your love; give them hope instead of despair, joy and gladness instead of grief, and a song of praise instead of sorrow.

Save us all from the dangers that surround us. Defend us, in body and soul, until that moment when we see the ascending and descending angels linking earth and heaven

permanently, when You call us from this life to live in Your presence for ever. All this we ask in the name of Jesus, Your Son. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

1 Samuel 3:1-20

¹ The boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The Word of the LORD was rare in those days. Visions were infrequent. ² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow so dim that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. ³ 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. ⁴ Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am."

⁵ He ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am. For you have called me."

However, Eli said, "I have not called you. Go back and lie down!"

So Samuel went and lay down. ⁶ Then the LORD called again, "Samuel!"

Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am. For you have called me."

Eli answered: "I have not called you, my son. Go back and lie down!"

⁷ Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the Word of the LORD was not yet being revealed to him. ⁸ Then the LORD called Samuel again, a third time. Samuel got up and went to Eli and said: "Here I am. For you have called me."

Then Eli realised that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ Therefore Eli told Samuel: "Go and lie down! If He calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening!'"

So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ Then the LORD came, stood there, and

called as He had called at the other times: "Samuel! Samuel!"

Then Samuel answered, "Speak! For Your servant is listening."

¹¹ Then the LORD told Samuel: "Look! I am about to do something in Israel, and the two ears of everyone who hears about it will tingle. ¹² On that day, I shall carry out against Eli everything I have spoken about his family, from the beginning to the end.

¹³ I have told him that I shall condemn his family for ever for the guilt about which he has known. For, although his sons were calling a curse down on themselves, he did not restrain them. ¹⁴ This is why I have sworn concerning Eli's family that no sacrifice or offering will certainly ever atone for the guilt of Eli's family."

¹⁵ Samuel lay down until the morning. Then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. However, Samuel was afraid to tell Eli about the vision. ¹⁶ Then Eli summoned Samuel, and said, "Samuel, my son!"

Samuel answered, "Here I am."

¹⁷ Eli asked: "What is the Message that He has told you? Please, do not hide it from me! May God treat you harshly and even worse if you hide anything from me out of the Message that He has spoken to you!"

¹⁸ So Samuel told him everything and did not hide anything from him. Eli answered: "He is the LORD. Let Him do what He thinks is right!"

¹⁹ As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him, and He did not let any of His Words remain unfulfilled.

²⁰ All Israel from Dan to Beer-Sheba knew that Samuel was a reliable prophet of the LORD.

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

¹² “All things are permissible for me” — but not all things are beneficial. “All things are permissible for me” — but I shall not be brought under anyone’s control. ¹³ “Foods are for the stomach, and the stomach is for foods” but God will put an end to both it and them. The body is not for sexual sin but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. ¹⁴ God has both raised the Lord, and will also raise us by His power. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them the members of a prostitute? Certainly not! ¹⁶ Or do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one body with her? For God says: “The two will become one flesh.” ¹⁷ However, he who is united with the Lord is one spirit with Him. ¹⁸ Flee from sexual sin! Every other sin that a person commits is outside the body. However, the person who sins sexually sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰ For you have been bought at a price. Therefore, glorify God with your bodies!

John 1:43-51

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip. Jesus told him, “Follow Me!”

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found the One about whom Moses wrote in the Law and about whom the prophets also wrote — Jesus, Joseph’s son from Nazareth.”

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