

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS ON THE LESSONS FOR JANUARY 17, 2021

1 Samuel 3:1-20

- Why does Samuel not recognize that God is calling him?
- Even though Eli doesn't realize at first who is calling Samuel, when he does he instructs Samuel how to listen for the voice. Sometimes we are like Samuel. When do we struggle to hear God's voice? What or who can help us to recognize God's voice? Sometimes we are Eli. How can we help others listen for God's voice?
- Pay attention to what God tells Samuel. He is being called to speak out against his mentor Eli – the very one who has helped him hear God's voice! When have we been uncomfortable with what God is saying to us?

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

- How often do you think of the wonderful creation of your body, of your being?
- These verses are perhaps the only Scriptural basis for the abortion debate. It is important to realize that the purpose of these verses are to marvel at this wonderful person that God has created in each of us. If we bring these verses into any pro-life debate, we must remind ourselves that these verses apply to all people, born and unborn, friend and enemy, rich and poor – there is no distinction!
- Contrast the tone of the psalm that we recite this Sunday with its concluding verses (19-24):

*O that you would kill the wicked, O God,
and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me—
those who speak of you maliciously,
and lift themselves up against you for evil!
Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?
I hate them with perfect hatred;
I count them my enemies.
Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.
See if there is any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.*

Perhaps the best way to view these verses is an honest expression of how we understand God's creation. Though we often can see ourselves as being in God's image, we struggle to see God's image in others – especially in our enemies. How can we see all people as God's wonderful creation? How can we help others do so?

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

- The letter in First Corinthians addresses numerous issues that divide the Corinthian church. Right before this passage, Paul admonishes the church for having lawsuits against fellow believers. Right after this, he deals with those who think they must abstain from marriage since Jesus will be returning soon. The difficulty with this passage is determining whether Paul is dealing with a separate issue or making a segue between two topics. If he is dealing with a separate topic, then it would seem that there are some that think it is okay to be with prostitutes – which seems to be odd (to say the least!). If this is a segue, then perhaps the “body” language Paul uses refers to the Body of Christ and not our personal bodies. If that is the case, then Paul would be suggesting that buying into worldly standards – like lawsuits – prostitutes or corrupts the Body of Christ.
- Paul provides here a principle that is useful for us to consider: Just because something is legal does not mean that it is something that we should do. We must always ask what is best, what is useful, what is beneficial.
- What does it mean to you to treat your body as “a temple of the Holy Spirit”? What would it mean for us to treat the “body” of the church as “a temple of the Holy Spirit”?

John 1:43-51

- Nazareth was a backwater town, an unknown village. Nathanael's reaction is not surprising. Where and when have we overlooked where God might be working because of our own prejudices?
- Nathanael sitting under the fig tree perhaps signifies Nathanael's expectation of the Messiah. He is awaiting God's Chosen One but does not know where to look. When does this describe us? Sometimes we are Nathanael and called to have our minds change about how God comes to us. Sometimes we are Philip and called to help others see where and how God is working.
- What do you think Jesus might mean by "angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man"? A seminary professor of mine connected this verse with the Resurrection in John 20 in which Mary Magdalene "saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet" (John 20:12). In other words, the angels ascending and descending refers to the angels at the empty tomb – one at the head (ascending) and the other at the feet (descending). If so, then Jesus invites Nathanael – and us – to rethink how we think God works. I include the poem "Miracles" by Walt Whitman with this as an example of changing how we see miracles, how we see God's working.

Miracles (by Walt Whitman - 1819-1892)

Why, who makes much of a miracle?
As to me I know of nothing else but miracles,
Whether I walk the streets of Manhattan,
Or dart my sight over the roofs of houses toward the sky,
Or wade with naked feet along the beach just in the edge of the water,
Or stand under trees in the woods,
Or talk by day with any one I love, or sleep in the bed at night with any one I love,
Or sit at table at dinner with the rest,
Or look at strangers opposite me riding in the car,
Or watch honey-bees busy around the hive of a summer forenoon,
Or animals feeding in the fields,
Or birds, or the wonderfulness of insects in the air,
Or the wonderfulness of the sundown, or of stars shining so quiet and bright,
Or the exquisite delicate thin curve of the new moon in spring;
These with the rest, one and all, are to me miracles,
The whole referring, yet each distinct and in its place.

To me every hour of the light and dark is a miracle,
Every cubic inch of space is a miracle,
Every square yard of the surface of the earth is spread with the same,
Every foot of the interior swarms with the same.

To me the sea is a continual miracle,
The fishes that swim—the rocks—the motion of the waves—the
ships with men in them,
What stranger miracles are there?