

Sermon – John 1:43-51; 1 Samuel 3:1-20
David R. Lyle
Grace Lutheran Church
2 Epiphany – Year B
14 January 2024

“An Eye-Opening Word”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name of God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. The word was rare that day. Two days ago, that is. I was waiting for a word from Erika. While Greta settled into a day of remote e-learning, while Anders and I settled into a good, old fashioned snow day, Erika and Torsten drove north into the teeth of the storm, bound for a hockey tournament in Madison. Travel sports in the Midwest make one walk the fine line between bravery and folly. I sat, waiting for a word, hoping soon to hear that all was well. I dared not call or text for fear of distracting her; tracking her phone wasn't all that helpful as she was moving so slowly it was hard to tell if she was moving at all. So, I waited, hour after hour, until finally she called. A drive that normally takes two and a half hours took nearly twice that. But the call did come, a word delivered directly from her: We made it. We're safe. We're here. The joy was twofold. I rejoiced in the news, and I rejoiced in hearing the voice that delivered the good news. The word was rare that day, but it did come. The voice so longed for did speak.
2. The word of the Lord was rare in those days. A long time had passed since the days of parted seas, of columns of fire and smoke, of Moses on the mountaintop. The Lord had brought them into the land, and then what? They carried the memories with them, but what of the future? Whither the house of Israel? Would the Lord stay silent forever? But in the quiet, we are told, the lamp of the Lord had not yet gone out. Samuel, Hannah's miracle child,

dedicated to the Lord's service, hears a voice. Whose? Eli's? Three times his ears hear and his eyes open. Eli, whose time is past, whose house is collapsing under the sin of his sons, has insight enough to point Samuel in the right direction: Say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." And the Lord does speak. A new day dawns, a new prophet emerges. The time of kings is coming, of Saul and, finally, David, with whom the Lord will make a new covenant. But it begins with the least likely of people, with a little boy who wasn't likely even to be born but grows now to be a trusted prophet, anointer and advisor of kings.

3. The word of the Lord was rare in those days. Or so it seemed to Nathanael. The monarchy was long gone. The only kings were puppets who did the bidding of oppressive foreign powers. Memory lived on, but hope for the future? From where would that come? Well, certainly not from Nazareth. What good could come from that small village, a cultural backwater even by the standards of lower Galilee? But the lamp of the Lord had not gone out; the Temple lamp has, in fact, taken on flesh in this One from Nazareth, this Jesus who is the Light that shines in darkness, that has not been overcome. Jesus of Nazareth, really? In the face of his friend's defensiveness, Philip doesn't put up a fight. He simply invites: Come and see. But Jesus has seen Nathanael first, there under the fig tree. His words voice makes Nathanael's ears tingle. His eyes, once closed with the blindness of prejudice, are opened. I wonder if Jesus is surprised to convince him with knowledge of the fig tree, or if that was meant simply to be an opening gambit. Either way, greater things are coming. Next stop Cana, Nathanael's hometown, where Jesus will work his first sign, water into finest wine. The Word now begins its new work.
4. Does the Word of the Lord seem rare in these days? It's been a long time since Jesus walked the roads of Galilee, healing illnesses and casting out demons. Perhaps we wonder, with world-weary cynicism, if he ever did such things at all. The signs obvious to our eyes are the opposite of graceful. Wars

rage. Upheaval and fear force hundreds of millions to leave their homes and take on the title of migrant. Our ears ring less with hope than with words of hate. Antisemitism and Islamophobia, not to mention good old fashion racism. Has the light gone out? Can anything good still come? Does the Lord have a word for the people?

5. In the fall of 1957, a still-young pastor serving in his first parish gave voice to the light. Martin Luther King Jr. stood before the people of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. Who was he to bring a word? Simply put, Dr. King was anointed by the Lord, called like Samuel and Nathanael before him. Called to speak, to fan the flickering flame of the lamp that others would hear and see. What to say to those in darkness, and to those in power who resisted turning on the lights? On that November day in 1957, Dr. King spoke with clarity about light and love and hope: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." These words echo across the years, some of his most well-known. And rightly so, for they are still true. We still live in dark times, hate lurking within and stalking without. But the lamp of the Lord has not gone out. God still speaks, calls. Calls you. And gives you the most potent weapons, which aren't, of course, weapons at all. Light. Love. The courage to speak, even if it feels like folly.

6. God speaks to us today, calling us to Christ. In these halting, imperfect words, yes, and in the gifts of bread and wine in which the Word is truly present for you. Come and see! With Samuel, hear, and discover your own voice. With Nathanael, walk with Jesus and discover that discipleship and relationship are two sides of the same coin. To walk with Jesus is to know him better; to know and be known by Jesus is to learn how to walk with him. As he walks with you, carry both memory *and* hope. If the Lord spoke to and through Samuel, Nathanael, and Martin, is not God speaking to you? Will not Christ speak through you? The Word of our God is not rare but abundant. The light

is not dim but bright. Still God needs the church – you! – to fan the flame and speak boldly. You need not even say that much. Sometimes, “Come and see” is the most powerful sermon of all. Come and see the One who speaks, the living Word that even death could not silence, the crucified and risen Lord of all who opens eyes and undoes graves. Come and see the goodness of our God. Hear the Word, whose voice itself is gift beyond measure. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.