

Come and See – God’s Invitation to Us

Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on January 17th 2021 - Psalm 139; 1 Samuel 3:1-10; John 1:43-51

God is everywhere – in the depths, in the heights, in secret places, in the silence, in the wisdom of mentors, in the advice of friends, even under a fig tree. God permeates the universe with a loving presence.

The psalmist insists that God is everywhere around us, continually approaching us intimately. The Psalmist says God searches us out and knows us intimately – our comings and goings, our innermost thoughts. It is God who forms us from our very beginning. It is God who comes to us no matter where we are physically, emotionally, and spiritually – nowhere is too remote for God. It is God who from beginning to end holds us. This is the God we gather to worship.

The story of Samuel and Eli reminds us that God approaches us even in the silence. This is a beautiful account of the call of Samuel. Samuel’s mother had believed that he was a true gift from God and as a boy had taken him to the temple, to Eli the priest, and left him there to be trained by Eli. Eli’s eyesight was fading and he was getting older. One night, as Samuel was sleeping, he heard his name being called in the stillness of the night. Assuming it was Eli he went into him to see what it was he wanted. Eli who hadn’t called him sent him back to bed, several times! When this happened a third time Eli realised it must have been God calling Samuel. So, Eli sends Samuel back to bed with some advice. When you are called again simply respond to God by saying – Speak, Lord your servant is listening. Samuel does.

Samuel grows up and goes on to become a famous prophet.

Samuel needed Eli’s help to recognise God’s voice. Samuel also reminds us that God sometimes speaks to us in the silence, in the dead of night. Samuel also reminds us that hearing God’s voice can also be confusing.

The story of Samuel reminds us that no matter what our age or circumstance, God continues to approach, address, soothe, stir, call and rejuvenate us all. God still calls and speaks to us – if only we will still ourselves and listen carefully.

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In our story from John’s Gospel we meet Philip and Nathanael who God approaches in Jesus. Jesus had already called Andrew and Simon Peter, who were disciples of John, to follow him. We are then told that Jesus sought Philip out and asked him to “follow me”. Philip becomes a disciple because of Jesus’ initiative and is overwhelmed that he has found (or perhaps has been found by) the one of whom Moses and the prophets wrote. This encounter leads him to communicate his experience with his friend Nathanael; this life changing experience for Philip must be shared.

Nathanael (the friend Philip shares his experience with) on the other hand is a little more sceptical. First, he is not sure that the Scriptures might find their fulfilment in some one from an unknown and insignificant northern town. Philip will have nothing of his scepticism and challenges him to come and check it out for himself to come and see.

Jesus approaches Nathanael and names him as someone who is both honest and frank, characteristics of which I think Jesus approves. He then tells Nathanael that he saw him under the fig tree, Jesus has sought him out. It is Jesus who spots someone and then welcomes them into his company or motley crew, without expecting complete faith straight away. It is okay to journey with Jesus with our questions, with our scepticism, with our doubts. Nathanael’s response to this encounter is to offer a confession of faith – the understanding Jesus shows, speaks volumes to Nathaniel.

God approached the first disciples in the person of Jesus. God still approaches us via the words, deeds and in the unique person of Jesus. Jesus then becomes the measuring stick for us to evaluate and discern any other approaches of God that come to us in the silence or in the voice of friends, in the words of Scripture.

As we begin a new year:

May our experience of God hemming us in on every side be a sense of a loving embrace rather than constrictive.

May we learn to befriend the silence so that we might hear the voice of God in a whisper.

May we recall the faces of our mentors who have helped us discern the voice of God and sense their encouragement.

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May we also become mentors for others, helping them discern the voice of God, encouraging them to stop and be still for a time to see what they hear.

May we be like Samuel and Philip to leave what we have and follow God on a journey.

May we be like Philip encouraging others to come and see Jesus for themselves, whatever their misgivings might be.

May we be like Nathanael – cynical, questioning, doubting and yet open to belief.

May we together discover God’s activity in our midst.

May we be able to say with Samuel as God approaches us – Speak, your servant is listening.

God will always approach us in many and varied ways – in the silence, in friends and mentors, in the light and life of Jesus.

John’s gospel begins the story of people following Jesus with the invitation to Nathanael by Philip to come and see. God continues to invite us to come and see.

Open yourselves to God, don’t hold back your questions, your fears, your doubts, bring them with you and come and see what good work God is doing in your life, in the life of this church and in the life of the world.

Amen.