

Epiphany 2 – Some things you have to hear to believe!

1. I had a hard time this week choosing a path for our sermon.
 - a. Our Gospel lesson from John is such a rich text that there's no way to mine it in one sermon
 - i. We are presented with Philip who provides us with the paradigm of evangelism when he tells his friend Nathanael to "come and see" this Jesus whom he has found is *the* Christ, the savior
 - ii. The invitation to "come and see" is an invitation to experience the Lord, to come to know Him as Savior for yourself
 - iii. This is the blueprint for the mission of the church, it's how the church grows in every time and place, by invitation.
 - iv. Allowing those who don't know Jesus to experience His grace and mercy for themselves.
 - b. And the thought that "seeing" is "believing" agrees with our experience in the world, we often hear people say that they have to see it to believe it
 - i. We are a sensory people, that is we trust what we can verify by touch or sight – they provide tangibility and confirmation
 - ii. Even the apostle Thomas, doubting Thomas, bolsters this assumption when he refuses to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead unless he saw Him and touched Him.
2. But with God somethings have to be heard to be believed, that's what we find in our Old Testament and Gospel lessons today
 - a. In the world we don't put much trust in what we hear as you can tell by the myriad maxims that remind us that words can't be trusted.
 - i. You can even blend them together to form a sentence, "We all know that talk is cheap; if you're going to be believed you have to put your money where your mouth is because actions speak louder than words."
 - ii. Humans put no trust in what we tell each other because empty words are just so easy to say.
 - b. A case in point is the flip flop of our political leaders have done over this past week in the wake of the riots, there were plenty of empty words on both sides.
 - i. For instance, this past summer while rioters burned and looted cities across the country, we were told they were peaceful protesters and if we defund the police the problem would go away.
 - ii. Now that the capitol, *their* workplace, has been invaded the "protestors" are what all mobs are, rioters, and the police who provided protection are heroes.

- iii. On the other side we've heard for 3 months that the election was stolen, the system is rigged, we have to take back our country, and other incendiary language.
 - iv. Now in the wake the riots those same people who stoked the flames that led to the violence are all about peace; rather than hold people accountable for their words and actions it's suddenly time to bury the hatchet and seek unity!
 - c. What is going on here!? Did we wake up in Wonderland where everything is upside down and backward?
 - i. The short answer is "Yes" the real Wonderland is the sinful broken world in which we live
 - ii. Here nothing makes sense, and the inhabitants (us) are eccentric and inconsistent because we are compelled by sin.
 - iii. We can't trust what people tell us because we're never sure that they mean what they say until their actions bear them out.
- 3. God doesn't work that way, He says what He means and means what He says.
 - a. That because His Word is reality, it has power, it creates what it names
 - i. When our Lord created the universe He merely spoke it into existence with, "Let there be..." and there was!
 - ii. Paul compares our coming to faith with God's act in creation in 2 Cor, "**For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**" (2Co 4:6)
 - iii. I submit to you that while Philip's invitation is the paradigm for evangelism "seeing" is not what brings faith – some things you have to hear to believe!
 - b. That's exactly what we see in our Old Testament lesson today, that God's Word, His call, creates faith and moves people and that is what is happening in our service today
 - i. Samuel was the son of a woman named Hannah who had been unable to conceive a child with her husband.
 - ii. After praying to the Lord, He enabled her to conceive and she promised to dedicate her son to His service
 - iii. Here the boy Samuel is living in the Temple with the High Priest Eli and the Lord commissions him for service.
 - iv. Samuel would become a priest and the last Judge (leader) of Israel before they received a King in Saul.
 - c. As Samuel is lying in the Temple trying to go to sleep the Lord calls Him
 - i. Of course, because he'd never heard God before he assumes it's Eli
 - ii. As the Lord continues to call Samuel and he keeps going to Eli

- iii. When Eli realizes it's the Lord he tells Samuel, **"Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'"** (1 Sam 3:9)
 - d. The hearing is faith, an assent to the call
 - i. Paul tells us in Rom 10, **So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.** (Rom 10:17)
 - ii. God's Word is creative, the call to follow is the call to believe
- 4. That's also what Nathanael experienced in our Gospel, the call that creates faith
 - a. When Philip brings Nathanael to the Lord it wasn't the seeing that converted him it was our Lord's words
 - i. John writes, **"Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!' Nathanael said to him, 'How do you know me?' Jesus answered him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.'"** (Joh 1:47-48)
 - ii. What in that exchange other than the power of God's almighty Word could have changed Nathanael's heart? He didn't convince Nathanael of anything other than that He already knew Him.
 - iii. Nathanael KNEW that He was in the presence of God, much like Samuel's "speak Lord your servant listens."
 - b. This pattern is repeated in the Gospel of John that faith comes by hearing
 - i. We see another example of it in chapter 4 with the Samaritan woman at the well
 - ii. After her conversation with Jesus at the well she returns to her village, **"Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"**
 - iii. Upon hearing the report the Samaritans came to him and invited Him to stay with them and he stayed with them for two days.
 - iv. After which John reports their reaction, **"They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.'"**
 - c. And that same call is happening today, right now as you hear the Word of the Lord - God's Word is not dead like our words, it creates what it names
 - i. In our service the Lord commissions each of us to follow Him just as He did Philip and Nathanael
 - ii. You have confessed your sins, you have received absolution and you have heard the commissioning of the prophet Samuel and two apostles.
 - iii. God's Word to them is God's Word to you, some things have to be heard to be believed so listen!
 - iv. Hear His call and follow that through your word and example others might hear the voice of Jesus calling them to come home.