

Prayer: Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit, we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations... (Peace of drawing close to you)

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight, you who are rock redeemer and Renewer of us all. Amen.

Good MORNING! Peace be with you in this New Year!

How is it with your soul? I PRAY it is well, as is mine.

So a quick check-in... Last week we remembered our Baptism and re-affirmed our Covenant of 'belonging' and continuing commitment to walk in the light with Jesus 'becoming' people of God.

How many times have you been reminded of your new beginning this week: In the shower... washing hands... splashing water in your face...dancing in the rain?

It is so important that Baptism not be an empty ritual or gesture that happened "once upon a time." We remember that water is a sign of the Holy Spirit that renews, refreshes, and offers a "clean start." Even our funeral rite of passage remembers the baptismal claim of Belonging: you are a child of God.

Today, as mentioned during the scripture introduction, these two passages were selected for their complimentary nature of listening and responding to the Word of God. Similar to last week's pattern, we are given a sense of the setting and then hear the action. It's so very much like a story or movie script...here's the way things ARE, and Action!

Last week, Genesis begins with a void of water and Spirit hovering. Then God creates by Word speaking light into being, naming day & night. Mark's gospel told us that John was in the wilderness inviting people to be 'baptized' as a sign of changing hearts & lives. Then all the people went out and were baptized.

The first reading today states that a boy was serving the Lord, mentored by the priest. Yet, the state of the world was bleak... 'The LORD's word was rare at that time and visions weren't widely known' (v1). Even the energy of the era is cast as depleted in the description of Eli, the priest, 'whose eyes had grown so weak he was unable to see' (v2). Yet there is a spark of **hope** found in the bleakness... 'God's lamp hadn't

gone out yet, and Samuel was lying down in the Lord's temple, where God's chest was' (v3).

Samuel is positioned to hear the voice, to see the work, and to experience the presence of God.

Thankfully the light dawned within Eli such that he realized it was God calling to Samuel and could direct the boy to respond. This is a new beginning for Samuel since 'the Lord's word hadn't yet been revealed to him' (v7). There is a new beginning for Eli, as well, as his role of mentor takes on New Meaning in preparing Samuel for a speaking (prophetic) ministry, not just the proper tasks of the temple. Eli affirms the revelation, gives direction and encouragement to speak truthfully. The result being that Samuel mates as a prophet and trusts in God.

Earlier in today's gospel, the Baptizer's disciples hear him testify that he's not the Messiah, that he saw the heavens open, the HS descend on Jesus and a voice speak with the gift of Assurance. Later, Jesus came by; proclaimed by John as 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29, 36). And from there, Jesus begins his mission and ministry as two of John's disciples follow Jesus in response to John's testimony. Jesus offers an invitation to 'come and see'. Andrew and others will also use this invitation to invite others to 'come and see' (John 1:39; 1:43, 46).

There is an emerging pattern here that weaves throughout the Holy Scriptures... that is, listening and responding. Listening and action feed each other as grace forms us into the people of God.

We can see the importance of this pattern in the first reading... 'the Lord's Word was rare'. What does that statement say when it is heard?

Based on what I know of God, That means ... God was present, God was speaking but NO ONE WAS LISTENING! Even those who were charged with a set apart role were not tuned in... not receiving the transmission... the wifi was down (if you will).

But Samuel was 'positioned' to hear... his GPS was engaged... he just didn't know the sender.

JB and his disciples, too, reflect the pattern of 'a call and response'. John the Baptist is the exemplar... living in the wilderness, call people to change their hearts and lives, offering a message that points to the Messiah. Andrew is the prime example of

becoming a disciple as he repeats the pattern, inviting Simon his brother, and then Nathaniel and then many more come and see who Jesus is.

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This has been a challenging season in the faith community of Saint James as families have been navigating serious health matters. We share the circumstances together, putting our trust in God. No matter the form of healing that comes... physical recovery & restoration to well-being or death and resurrection to new life, every time the call goes out this congregation responds.

This faith community lives as people who respond to the call to aid, support, and pour love into those in need. The most recent example is in supporting the Day family. Whether the need is for prayer, or food, or presence, you are living out the mission and ministry of loving God and God's people. You proclaim your faith and your discipleship as you embody the servanthood and God's love for the world as hungry are fed, thirst is quenched, and love is poured out. 'Take heart, you are not alone' is the message you send when you respond with hands and feet and hearts.

Let's pray.... (on screen)

**Response to the Word**

God calls us this day:

**by touching our minds with wisdom and truth,  
by healing our hearts with love and joy,  
by blessing our bodies with vitality and strength,  
by reviving our souls with fullness of grace.**

With every fiber of your being, offer your reply:

**"Here I am, for you called me.**

May it be so...so be it. Amen.