

The Lord is Here

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Epiphany 2

Introduction

Way back 'in the good old days', we'd go to a dance or a ball, and there'd be a compere. At the beginning of each dance, what would the compere say? "Ladies and gentlemen, take your partners – for the waltz, the quickstep, the Foxtrot or – oh excitement – the tango or the rhumba. Who can remember waiting for the 'take your partners'? The boys would size the girls up and head over and ask: would you like to dance? The girls would size the boys up and say 'Yes' or 'Sorry, I'm sitting this one out'. If they got up to dance, they got to know each other, remember, those were the days when talking to each other was part of dancing. What was it like the first time you did one or the other? Feel a bit anxious? What if I don't measure up? Or maybe not even considering that you'd be left or refused? When you sat down again you were a changed person, not the person you thought you were.

Each of our three readings is about 'take your partners', for the dance of life, you might say. Each of them takes seriously that we are spiritual as well as physical beings, and that we should be careful about choosing the spirit in which we commune, in which we unite.

1 Samuel 3:1-10

The boy Samuel went into spiritual partnership with God when he Answered 'Yes' to God's call, with the words 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening'. Doesn't matter that he's a young person. God had seen him and known him as one who'd work with a steadfast and self-giving love for the best interest and welfare of his people, bringing the peace that comes from

rising above the anxieties that limit us unnecessarily.

God favoured Samuel to work in spiritual partnership and demonstrate that God was still present with the people. This time to save them from the wickedness of the sons of the good priest Eli and restore life to the people. After Samuel answered 'Yes' to God's call, Eli encouraged him to tell what God had said to him (although he already knew). It took a great deal of courage for the boy, Samuel, to tell Eli what God had said to him concerning the dismal future for Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas and the family line.

Samuel had thought of himself as a boy and servant of Eli. Now, he had the awareness of who he could be and with his answer 'Yes', first to God, and then to Eli's 'Tell me', who he would be. Samuel had a different understanding of himself. He was not a servant of Eli, first. He was a servant of God working in spiritual partnership to do God's will.

John 1:43-51

Philip saw himself differently when he went into spiritual partnership with God active in Jesus of Nazareth. Philip answered 'Yes' to Jesus' call 'Follow me'. In becoming a disciple of Jesus, he immediately did what Jesus had done. Just as Jesus had sought and found Philip, so Philip sought and found Nathanael.

Jesus had seen the little exchange under the fig tree between the two men, the look on Philip's face as he said enthusiastically that he and his neighbours, Andrew and Peter, had in effect found the Messiah and named him as Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth. Nathanael's face reflected his words: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth!". The look was obviously not one of wonder and delight! Not even of feigned, benign bewilderment just to be polite. More likely the look was one of disdainful disbelief, completely without guile. Yet Jesus had seen in Nathanael one who could work with him to

give new life to their people and their world. The people would not die out in the terrible times that were coming. but survive, overcome fear, and live to flourish. How do we detect this from John's narrative?

Jesus referenced Jacob when he said of Nathanael, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" (other translations read 'guile'). Jacob had twice deceived. He deceived his father, Isaac, into giving him the inheritance and blessing that rightfully belonged to the first-born son, his elder brother, Esau.

Nathanael met Philip under the fig tree, the tree symbolically associated with future well-being and prosperity. Jesus told Nathanael "You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man", a similar vision to that of Jacob's ladder, the vision that began Jacob's transformation. Jacob was deceived by his father-in-law to labour more than the promised seven years to marry Rachel. For love of Rachel, Jacob laboured fourteen years. When the time came to return home, Jacob overcame extreme anxiety to meet with his brother, Esau, once more. He was a changed person. So great was the difference in the new from the old Jacob that his name became Israel, and with Abraham and Isaac took his place as a revered father of the people, a giver and protector of life. Jacob was no longer the person he had thought he was.

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Paul was concerned for the Corinthians. Their sexual practices were neither physically nor spiritually life-giving. They had said 'Yes' to God, but they could not spiritually partner God **and** continue in their old ways. Paul exhorts them to leave behind an, let's say, unbeguiling part of who they thought they were, their identity, and transform so that they could partner God in a far greater enterprise, the transformation of humankind.

Stephen Koski wrote this about a woman called Grace who he met on a marathon. Grace was 63 years old and thought she was running in the five-mile fun-run. She'd never run more than that in her life but she'd mistakenly gone to the starting line of the 26-mile marathon. Stephen had to break the news to her that when she hit five miles she had a little further to go. He wrote: 'Grace's attitude was amazing. She said, "I'm here so I'll run as far as I can." I chose to walk during the water stations and Grace was afraid that if she stopped she wouldn't get going again so she passed me ... I crossed the finish line in a little over four hours and thirty minutes. I had to find Grace to see if she finished. There were 10,000 runners so it took me a while but I found her lying on the ground unable to move. She finished in four hours and fifteen minutes.

She had never run more than five miles in her life. She had a sad expression on her face so I asked her what was wrong. She said, "About the twenty-third mile, I knew I was going to finish and it was like my life flashed before my eyes. I can do this?! I looked back on my life and began to wonder about all the ways I've limited myself by what I thought I couldn't do," Then a sheepish grin appeared, "But, let me tell you I'm also looking forward and I'm wondering what's next." Grace taught me a valuable lesson. It's not who you are that holds you back. It's who you think that you're not.'

God is here to partner each of us, transforms us, and unite us for the welfare of humankind and the world.