

## Called to be Light

I'm going to begin with a poem about Epiphany, even though that feast is behind us, because the readings today are about something manifesting or making a striking appearance, so I think I can get away with it!! And all of the poems I share today I will be reading twice through.

*Be bold, like the Magi. Do not tarry, settling into your comfort, but rather set out, keeping the star in your vision. It will lead you to the place you are most in need of, the place where God is. And if an angel warns you in a dream not to return by the old way, please listen.*

I wrote that poem for a beloved friend of mine who has a deep yearning for God, but who is a little attached to his own comfort, and really, who isn't? It might be the single most problematic thing around being a genuine disciple – a true follower of Christ. I read that poem myself – or perhaps I should say, pray my way through that poem – on a regular basis.

When we are called, and I believe that all of us are called, it will most assuredly be out of the familiar and even habitual ways we live. In the Old Testament reading, it takes Eli a while to perceive what is going on, that it is the Lord who is calling Samuel. In the translation that I read, I was struck by Eli's instruction "Go back to sleep".

Some of the other translations have Eli saying “Go back and lie down” but I like “Go back to sleep” because it reminds me of a wonderful Rumi poem.

*The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you. Don't go back to sleep. You must ask for what you really want. Don't go back to sleep. People are going back and forth across the doorsill where the two worlds touch. The door is round and open. Don't go back to sleep.*

I'm not an early riser, but I love that idea of not going back to sleep - of all those mysterious things that can happen on the threshold between sleeping and waking. There is a vulnerability when we aren't quite awake – when we haven't got all of our defenses back in place yet – a time when God might be able to penetrate us.

So first comes the willingness to listen – to make some space inside where we are actually able to listen, and then, the willingness to go forth in faith. In John's gospel passage, Jesus is fairly straightforward – “Follow me” – and in most of the New Testament accounts, the apostles respond immediately. The passage today is a favorite, because at least it includes Nathanael's honest question, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”

Jesus seems to appreciate that, and after a short exchange, Nathanael, too, is convinced that Jesus is the Promised One.

There must have been something so compelling in the person and presence of Jesus to elicit that kind of immediate response and conviction. So, where does that compelling person of Jesus show up in our own lives and what is Jesus asking here and now?

I'll share a story from my own life that happened just over a year ago. (share *Aftermath of War...in their own Words*) Have any of you experienced a moment when you felt completely free to say yes or no but the only answer was yes? I knew I was being called forward, I knew I was free, and I knew as a follower of Christ that the only answer was yes.

Mary Oliver is a favorite poet, and just recently I came upon a poem of hers that speaks to this so eloquently. *What I Have Learned So Far. Meditation is old and honorable, so why should I not sit, every morning of my life, on the hillside, looking into the shining world? Because, properly attended to, delight, as well as havoc, is suggestion. Can one be passionate about the just, the ideal, the sublime, and the holy, and yet commit to no labor in its cause? I don't think so. All summations have a beginning, all effect has a story, all kindness begins with the sown seed. Thought buds toward radiance. The gospel of light is the crossroads of—indolence, or action. Be ignited, or be gone.*

The gospel of light is not only about embracing the Light of Christ, but being the Light of Christ. As the poet says so beautifully, “Be ignited, or be gone.”

Another Mary I'm very fond of allowed herself to be ignited in a very particular way, and that is Mary of Nazareth, the mother of Jesus. I'd like to share a poem about Mary entitled *Incandescence*.

*So, just like another Beginning – the room was filled with light. And then, what – a voice unlike any you had heard before speaking impossible, incomprehensible words. And yet, your deep and grave attention – your astonishing generosity to take in what this messenger was saying to you. Allowing your teenage body to be a vessel for God – to let the miracle flow through you in service of the entire world. What would happen if we allowed God in as you once did. Would the world not be filled with Light.*

So, there is Mary, listening deeply, accepting God's wish for her and going forth immediately to share the light with her cousin Elizabeth. Many years later, when Jesus is first gathering his apostles, he often says, "Come and see". In fact, Philip says it to Nathanael in the gospel reading we heard today. "Come and see". What do you hear in that phrase "come and see"? I hear – come and see who you can be when you step into your truest existence – your full humanity. Don't live a muted life – a hesitant life. Be bold. Be ignited.

As we move further into the ministry of Jesus, in one version of the multiplication of loaves and fishes, Jesus says to the apostles,

“Why do you not give them something to eat yourselves”. What is Jesus calling forth from his friends in that moment? What is he beginning to prepare them for?

I believe Jesus wants the apostles to compose themselves in the possibility of prayer and faith. I believe Jesus is training them to live as He lives, readying them for a time when He will no longer be walking and working in their midst. He will always be with them– but in a different way.

Earlier in the first chapter of John’s gospel, the writer says, “The real light which gives light to every person was coming into the world.” Mary said yes to the light, and the light was indeed born into the world. Now, we are the ones who must keep the light burning with the flame of our own lives. And if I may end with one final poem.

*I want you to notice when you are out and about in the world – I want you to notice how the light lands differently on what is living. I want you to notice what is green and pulsing in the world with the eyes of a painter or a poet. Now, go and live like that.*

Christine Rodgers