



January 17

THE NEW SHOFAR

Christ Jesus is the Light of our lives

Or we condemn ourselves to darkness

if you are called, reply, 'Speak, Yahweh, for your servant is listening'

It was not until Samuel had been called three times that the voice of God was finally heard, and even then, he only understood what was happening when Eli intervened. He was a man called from birth for the Lord's work... *I am about to do something in Israel (says Yahweh)*. This is a significant part of the biblical theology of the Bible: God's saving works unfold through those He has called, chosen and formed. It is this understanding of our place in creation Paul picks up later in our second reading today... *Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?* What God wants is for us to be collaborators in the divine creative and saving works in creation, in human history, in Christ. This is what the Samuel narrative highlights.

Does this not create a challenge for all of Christ's disciples? We are God's *holy people*, a *priestly people* set apart for sacred activities. This is always to be our starting point in understanding our own unique place in our world. We are precious to God. Others are precious to God. We form a community of precious people called and chosen that the world may know the loving mercy of God Almighty.

All of that sounds so easy, but is that our experience?

I suspect that Samuel, like the rest of us, had many important, pressing and time-consuming matters going on in his mind. The cacophony of daily living so easily drowns out the call of God. It is often even more difficult to hear God's call when we have a specific divine response to our prayers in mind. We have turned to God in our need and await His response. We wait; and we wait; and we wait, wondering whether or not our pleas have even been heard. Our needs can fill our ears to the point where we fail to hear God. We become a lot like Samuel and the psalmist: *I have waited, waited for Yahweh...* and have resisted to move on without Him.

This is hope-filled waiting, waiting in obedience for God and it is not easy to sustain. The temptation is always to move ahead of God, to go and work on our own solution, one best fitting my personal desires and wants. It is then our wishes that become, magically, the "word of God". I remember one priest in Ballarat telling me he had prayerfully pondered the request for him to take on a new parish in the Diocese. The result of his praying was that God "told me to stay where am". He "understood" the good God did not want him to move to a struggling rural community in need of a

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new beginning. What a wonderfully convenient God! However, I suspect this was *not* the *listening* to Yahweh of which Samuel is speaking. It serves as a timely warning: sometimes (often?) what we take up as the divine word may be little more than our own attempts to become masters and mistresses of our own destinies, to work in the Kingdom of God in ways we would prefer.

But whoever is joined to the Lord becomes one Spirit with him.

Paul opens our reading with a significant insight – *our bodies are made for the Lord and not for the passions and ways of the wider world*. In other words, our lives are defined in terms of Christ the Lord and not by our human achievements, successes, sins or failures. We have been set free from all of those. Set free by the death and resurrection of Christ. This is why he is able to speak about our being *joined* to the Lord. Joined, not by our own worthiness or efforts, but through the grace of the sacraments, through living in the Christian community, the Body of Christ; through being caught up in the revealed Word of God. These are all divine gifts with which this divine union is made a reality. It all comes down to the decisions we make to the invitations offered to us by God through His Risen and Glorious Son. But first we need to *hear* God calling us. We then need humbly to pray...*Speak Lord, your servant is listening*. Listening to God and not to the world. Listening to God and not to our own voice tempting us to continue on as we are, people who are unable to let go of the demands, temptations and non-nourishing food of the world. Whenever these come our way the response is clear: I am one with Christ and it is the Spirit of Christ who will fight alongside of me, will nourish me and will bring me to Himself.

You were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your living

It would be spiritually arrogant for us to presume we can begin 2021 in the same depth of relationship with God that has sustained us in the past. Covid should have brought us closer to God (if we were listening). We have been reminded of the limitations of our human science, knowledge and of the fragility of our bodies. How many hundreds of thousands have died from this microscopic bug? Death and the fear of death has frightened millions and stopped the world in its tracks. Rich and poor; famous and the unknown; saints and sinners, all have been brought low by something beyond our power to contain. Does that not remind us of an important biblical truth? Does it not set down a way forward for 2021?

We are dust and we will all return to the dust from which we came. That cannot be avoided. As the psalmist says, *our span is seventy years, or eighty for those who are strong...they pass swiftly and we are gone*. If God is not with us throughout those years and we are not united with Christ, from where then does our hope for life eternal come? The answer is provided for us by Andrew - *We have found the Messiah*. “Finding” The Messiah is not like finding lost keys. “Finding” here picks up what Paul says. It means hearing God speak to us, offering us His Son as our Messiah. The next essential step is then entwining our lives around Him.

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