

These are very sensual passages in the sense that all our senses are involved and speak to us of spiritual things, of God as present in our flesh- so that what we do with the flesh and how we use our senses matters. The call of Samuel is both interior and exterior – he hears a voice. In our overwhelmingly secular understanding of today we would probably call in a doctor when someone hears voices but Eli lived in a more enlightened age and realises something is going on here which needs to be taken seriously, that is, listened to, allowed to have it's say. This in one sense will redound on Eli because the word that Samuel receives, and the bit missing from today's passage, is a harsh condemnation of Eli's family and its abuse of its priestly powers. But when Samuel is coaxed by Eli to repeat what he's heard, Eli accepts it as God's will.

*"It is the Lord; let him do what he thinks good"* (RSV/JB) he says.

In his blindness he has failed to see God's will and to do it but now through the gentle words of a child he is able to receive God's truth and let it be. And this says something of the nature of revelation and how it is to be mediated through human beings – if we have a word for one another it goes nowhere without love. Paul too has harsh words for his Corinthian audience which has confused Greek philosophical ideas on freedom with the freedom which comes from following Christ, with becoming one with Christ in both body and spirit. Once again we hear that overcoming of the divisions between body and spirit which is won for us in Christ, in God's affirming of the flesh as "godly", as good, in the idea of the Word become flesh, in the idea then of resurrection. So we have a newly-won freedom which is the polar opposite of doing whatever we like with our body or anyone else's. It's a body constrained by Christ, called to follow Christ, to be Christ in all it's senses. Paul's words will also go nowhere without love, that subtle working of the oil of God's holy spirit that allows even harsh words to be accepted as Good News, as Gospel, as God's Word. Jesus of course exercises this capacity to speak and be God's word without parallel and John's gospel delights in showing both its subtlety and effectiveness, subtle in its use of words which have both a material and a spiritual meaning, and effective because spoken with love. Jesus in John's gospel is not speaking in order to build himself up, or to wield power over others, but to invite them to live in that space where God's love can come to completion.. Or in the words of Catherine Clifford paraphrasing Pope Francis's hopes for the Church in his encyclical "Evangelii Gaudium" ("The Joy of the Gospel")

*"That mission, put simply, is to create spaces where those who seek the face of God might encounter God's loving mercy, where they might encounter Christ"* (OIC 2024)

This is the space we hear Jesus inviting John's two disciples into when he says "*Come and see*". One of the great privileges I have as a monk which immediately evokes curiosity in others- so rare have we become – is to simply say when they want to know more about what it all means "*come and see*". It's essentially a sensual experience. I'll leave it there for the moment and hope that I don't get quoted out of context.

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