

Speak Lord Your Servant is Listening

The first reading is taken from the Book of Samuel. It is written at a time when Israel is in need of a prophet. God chooses Samuel to be a prophet who will bring his word to his people. Twice Samuel hears the word of the Lord. Both times he goes to the priest Eli and asks what he needs. Eli knows that God is speaking to Samuel and so he tells Samuel to say to the Lord, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." The third time that God speaks, Samuel responds, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." This begins a prophetic career in the life of Samuel in God speaks to his prophet and Samuel faithfully speaks God's word to his people.

This phrase, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." has been one of my favorite forms of prayer especially as I read Scripture. God has answered this prayer for me both through helping me understand Scripture and through helping me experience God's presence in silent prayer. I believe this prayer speaks about our life in general. Our lives are to be constantly open to the voice of God in our lives. God may speak in the silence of our hearts but God also speaks in the people and circumstances in our lives. May our lives be open to the ways in which God speaks to us.

The Call of Jesus' Disciples

In today's Gospel we hear the call of the first disciples. This reading is taken from the Gospel of John. This reading is told in a different way than the same story is told in the Gospel of Mark. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus is walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The first disciples hear Jesus' call and immediately leave their father in the boat and follow Jesus. In John's Gospel, Jesus does not call the disciples. Instead John the Baptist points out Jesus as the Lamb of God and the disciples follow Jesus. Throughout the Gospel of John disciples go out and call others to Jesus. John the Baptist brings Andrew and another unnamed disciple to Jesus. Andrew then brings his brother, Simon Peter, to Jesus (notice that Peter is not the first follower in John's Gospel). Later Phillip brings Nathanael to Jesus (1:45-51), and the Samaritan woman brings her townspeople to him (4:29-42). In our lives we are to also call others to Jesus. How well do we call others to Christ?

An important title for Jesus in the Gospel of John is the Lamb of God. In John's Gospel, Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. In the Fourth Gospel Jesus is symbolically the Passover Lamb who is sacrificed for the salvation of God's people. In the Exodus the Passover Lamb was sacrificed and its blood was smeared on the doorposts of the Hebrew People so that the angel of death would pass over their homes and save the firstborn males of their families. Jesus died at the exact moment that Passover lambs were sacrificed in the Temple. The soldiers did not break any of the bones of Jesus body as he hung upon the cross. This is presented as prophetic of his being sacrificed as the Passover lamb was sacrificed.

Jesus says to the disciples who are following him, "What are you looking for?" The disciples then say to him, "Rabbi, (which means Teacher), where do you stay?" The use of the term Rabbi reveals the lack of faith of the disciples. The disciples use the term of respect, Rabbi to address Jesus. This shows that they do not understand that Jesus is the Messiah. Through the Gospel of John each of the characters lacks faith and only through their dialogue with Jesus are they able to grow in faith. This is true of us as well. No matter where we are in the spiritual life we have a need to grow in faith. Our faith grows through our encounter with the risen Christ.

The disciples ask Jesus where he stays. The response of Jesus is "Come and see." The disciples followed Jesus to his home and stayed with him that day. This scene opens up a major theme in John's Gospel which is the theme of abiding. In the first chapter of John's Gospel we learn that Jesus is the Word of God that made his dwelling among us. In this Gospel the disciples are invited to abide with Jesus as they decide whether to become disciples. Disciples are invited into a close relationship with the Father and Jesus. This relationship of mutual abiding is most clearly shown in the story of the vine and the branches. Jesus is the vine and disciples are the branches. Disciples are to remain in Jesus. For those who abide in Christ, Christ becomes their source of life.

The synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke, portray discipleship in terms of Jesus calling, teaching and sending his disciples out. The Gospel of John has Jesus teach his disciples but he does not send them out on a missionary journey during his lifetime. In John's Gospel the disciples are called to enter into a mutual relationship of life and love with Jesus and the Father. Future disciples are promised that following the commandments of Jesus and living his love will lead to a mutual indwelling of the Father and Jesus with the disciples. For me the portrayal of discipleship by the synoptic Gospel writers and the theme of mutually indwelling in the Gospel of John complement one another. The Gospel of John shows that The Father and Jesus must dwell in the hearts and lives of the disciples. Discipleship must begin with this mutual indwelling. We must be rooted in Christ in order to be his disciples.

The disciples who lived in his lifetime are to live in a life of mutual love of Jesus and the Father. We those who gain faith from the Scriptures are to also live in mutual love of Jesus and the Father. Our source of life is to be our mutual indwelling with Jesus and the Father. Just as the teaching and life of Jesus revealed the Father to the world so our love will reveal the Father and Jesus to the world.

The Gospel of John also says that the fruit of mutual indwelling with Jesus and the Father is love. To abide or dwell in Christ means to love. Becoming a part of the oneness between Jesus and the Father is living in Jesus' love and showing living that love out in our lives. The entire life of the Christian including his/her ministry of a Christian must be an expression of love.

The Gospel that we hear proclaimed this morning asks leaves of with the following questions for our personal reflection:

ARE WE MAKING GOD KNOWN AS DID THE DISCIPLES WHO LIVED DURING THE LIFE TIME OF JESUS?

THROUGH FAITH AND LOVE ARE WE ABIDING IN CHRIST IN THE MIDST OF A HOSTILE WORLD?

DOES OUR LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER SHOW THAT THEY ARE FRIENDS OF JESUS?