

# HE COMES TO US AS ONE UNKNOWN

I Samuel 3:1-10; John 1:43-51

Epiphany 2, January 14, 2018

**Albert Schweitzer was 90 years old when he died in 1965. He was an ordained Lutheran pastor;** a German and French theologian (equally fluent in both languages). He was an accomplished organist--especially skilled in playing the great works of Johann Sebastian Bach. He was a noted author and he was also a licensed physician--who became a surgeon no less!

**In 1952 he received the Nobel Prize for Philosophy;** in large part because his philosophy of life that enabled him to build a large hospital in West Central Africa.

Albert Schweitzer also wrote some very **MYSTICAL WORDS**--about the miracle of faith; about how our gracious Triune God breaks through all the darkness of sin and death and **one day establishes a personal relationship with us through his Word; through the good news of his love for all human beings in the gift of his only-begotten Son our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!** These words, I have in mind, even became the basis for the lyrics in the lovely song that the choir is singing our 10:30 Service today. Listen to just some of these words:

He comes to us as One unknown, a Breath unseen, unheard; as through within a heart of stone  
Or shriveled seed in darkness sown; a pulse of being stirred; a pulse of being stirred.

He comes in love as once he came, by flesh and blood and birth: to bear within our mortal frame  
A life, a love, a saving Name; for every child of earth; for every child of earth.

He comes to us when faith is grown; believed, obeyed adored! Through Christ throughout the  
Scripture shown  
As yet unseen, but not unknown; our Savior and our Lord; our Savior and our Lord.

**It is a very fitting anthem that the choir is singing--because the common theme in all three of our appointed Scripture lessons today is the call of God--as it goes out to human being!**

**And how about those well-known words of God, going out to a young boy named Samuel in our appointed Scripture lessons for today! How would you have liked to be awakened in the wee hours of the morning by someone calling your name?**

**As a young boy, Samuel was certain that it was his master--Eli; an elderly priest by this time who may have called out to Samuel on previous occasions, for some type of help he wanted from Samuel during the middle of the night.**

**Some of you may remember that my wife's mother lived with us in our home the last four years of her life! It wasn't until the last year, but there were a few times during the last year of her life when she would call out in the middle of the night: "Lisa! Lisa!"**

Because my wife sleeps far more soundly than I do at night, she didn't even hear her mother's call, but I did! Trying to be helpful I would **go downstairs and poke my head into her room and ask her: "Hey, Lois, what do you need?"** AND THE REPLY WOULD SOMETIMES BE: **"NOT YOU!"** SO THAT THEN I'D GO BACK UP STAIRS AND CALL OUT SAYING: "Lisa, Lisa!"

**But what about you if you had been that young boy, Samuel? Would you immediately have jumped out of your bed and walked in your bare feet across a cold, stone floor to the room where the priest by this time, maybe even an elderly gentleman by this time, was sleeping--ONLY TO HAVE HIM TELL YOU THAT HE WASN'T CALLING OUT TO YOU, AT LEAST NOT ON THAT PARTICULAR NIGHT AT ALL!**

**If it is true, and we know that it is true, that we love God ONLY BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US; IT IS EQUALLY TRUE THAT WE CALL OUT TO GOD AT TIMES ONLY BECAUSE HE HAS FIRST CALLED OUT TO US.**

**Finally the third time THIS EXCHANGE BETWEEN SAMUEL AND ELI TAKES PLACE, Eli has a real "epiphany;"** one of those great "AHA" MOMENTS" in life--telling Samuel: "The next time you hear that voice calling out to you in the middle of the night, respond like this: 'Speak Lord, for your servant is listening!'"

And God did speak to Samuel--and while I don't want to delve into the message that God had for Samuel IN DETAIL, which was A MESSAGE of great importance--let me assure you that the **words that follow tell how Samuel WOULD BE USED BY GOD to lead his people through one of the most critical periods OF Israel's whole history, and how they transitioned from being a tribal league into a monarchy. And how Saul would end up anointing Saul as King, first, but then David as King secondly; the first two kings of Israel!**

**SAMUEL WAS THE LAST AND THE BEST OF THE JUDGES; AS WELL AS THE FIRST OF THE ORDER OF PROPHETS. HE ESTABLISHED THE PATTERN OF THE PROPHET AS THE CRITIC AND CENSOR OF THE KING IN ISRAEL. THE WORD OF God was given to Samuel as he prayed: "*Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening!*"**

**AND BY THE GRACE OF GOD, GOD STILL CALLS OUT TO US--THROUGH THAT POWERFUL MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL; THE GOSPEL OF WHICH ST PAUL SAID ONE DAY: "*I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe! To Jews first, but also to Greeks*" (Romans 1:16)!**

**BROTHERS AND SISTERS, AS AMERICANS, WE ALL REVERE OUR**

**PRIVACY, DON'T WE? We want our privacy at all costs! And when someone infringes on our privacy we are deeply incensed!** When we fall victim to an identity theft, we know that our privacy has been deeply violated. We guard the information about ourselves that we share with others. We take great care in revealing who we really are--sometimes even to our closest family members and friends!

**AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, WE POSSESS A DEEP DESIRE FOR ANOTHER PERSON TO TRULY KNOW AND UNDERSTAND US COMPLETELY. AND THE APPOINTED PSALM FOR THIS DAY--PSALM 139--ASSURES US THAT THE PERSON WHO KNOWS US THE VERY BEST IN THE LORD GOD ALMIGHTY, WHO DESIRES THROUGH THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT--WORKING THROUGH GOD'S HOLY WORD AND SACRAMENTS--TO CREATE THE GIFT OF FAITH WITHIN EVERY ONE OF US SO THAT WE, IN RETURN, MIGHT COME TO KNOW HIM ALSO IN THE MOST INTIMATE OF WAYS! Psalm 139 goes like this:**

O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and  
When I rise up! You discern my thoughts from afar!

You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways!  
Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely!

You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me!

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me! It is so high, I cannot attain it!

And then there is the call of Christ for the men whose names are mentioned in our Gospel lesson today to become enlisted as Jesus' first disciples. St John has just told us that Jesus called out to Andrew: "Follow me!" and Andrew followed Jesus! And then Andrew goes and finds his brother, Simon Peter, and tells him, "We have found the Messiah, the One of whom the prophets wrote and takes him to meet Jesus! And Jesus calls Peter to be his disciples. And Peter follows Jesus. Then Peter calls Philip to be his disciples, and Philip becomes his disciple!

**But then Philip approaches Nathanael, whose name in the first three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke is not given to us as Nathanael but as Bartholomew!** Maybe his name was Nathanael Bartholomew! When Philip tells him: "We have found the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth!" Philip is highly skeptical. For after all Nathanael grew up in the neighboring town of Cana--which certainly was no great metropolitan center--of cultural or foreign exchange in the ancient world either!

When Nathanael asks Philip, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip does not launch into giving Nathanael 15 reasons why--of course, something good could come out of Nazareth! Instead--he invites him to come and to spend a little time in the company of the early Christian Community--confident that God's Word--spoken there--might very well break through the cold stone heart of Nathanael and find a welcomed reception there too!

You know we human beings have many fears and doubts! But please note that Jesus did not reject Nathanael because of his doubts! And Jesus' reaction to Nathanael's doubt is really startling! Jesus didn't scold Nathanael for his arrogant put-down. Jesus did not lambaste him! Instead Jesus complimented him, saying: "Behold an Israelite in whom there is no guile!"

What Jesus is saying here is that he knew Nathanael better than even Nathanael knew himself. Jesus knew that Nathanael was one of those guys who always shoots straight from the hip! Nathanael was so dumbstruck by what had happened--that he calls out to Jesus immediately: ***"Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"***

Brothers and sisters, we all have doubts, don't we, about many things! We doubt our own ability to fulfill tasks we have been trained for! We doubt the many promises of politician! We doubt rosy economic forecasts that are made to us through the media! We are all, by nature, skeptics; especially when it comes to our readiness to accept new ideas and untried methods!

**BUT WITHOUT A DOUBT, THE ONE THING THAT CAUSES US MORE PERSONAL ANGUISH THAN ANYTHING ELSE--IS THE UNCERTAINTY WE MAY HAVE ABOUT GOD--NOT ONLY THAT HE EXISTS, BUT THAT IF HE DOES EXIST--HOW CAN WE KNOW AND BELIEVE, THAT HE REALLY DOES LOVE US!**

The Good News is that our Lord does not abandon us or forsake us because of our doubts!

It's still through the gift of his Word, the Word of God given to us in the Holy Scriptures, and the Word of God--that is the Gospel we preach--and the Word of God that becomes highly visible to us in the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper that God gives to us--**IT IS STILL THROUGH THESE POWERFUL MEANS OF GRACE THAT GOD BREAKS THROUGH OUR DOUBTS AND MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN TO US AND PLACE HIS LOVE INSIDE OF US!**

Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!

How precious did that grace appear, the hour, I first believed!

God's Word and sacraments do bring us to faith! I know it is a song I've mentioned before also; one I used to sing back in my college days! "It only takes a spark to get a fire going, and soon all those around can warm up in its glowing! That's how it is with God's Word once you've EXPERIENCED IT. IT'S FRESH LIKE SPRING! YOU WANT TO SING! YOU WANT TO PASS IT ON! Amen