

1 Samuel 3:1-10; Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18;
1 Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1:43-51

I bring you greetings this morning from our Bishop Penrose Hoover, his staff, and the congregations of the West Shore Conference, as well as myself. It is indeed my great privilege and pleasure to be here this morning for worship and to install your new Spiritual Gifts Coordinator, Judy Collins.

One of the wonderful little inventions of my youth was the transistor radio. The one I carried around with me was a little green box about four inches in length, two and a half inches wide, and about an inch in depth. What a marvel! It was much improved over the big box we had sitting in the dining room, and I loved carrying that with me. See, in my household the telephone was off limits to children (Can you imagine that?). And my grandmother, well she owned that box of tubes we called a black and white television, and I had nothing to do changing the channels (there were only three). But I had that transistor radio, and I would take it into the kitchen at night and sit at the kitchen table (in those days we actually ate meals at the kitchen table, but that's all we did), so it was there I would go at night when the Phillies were playing, and get away from my brother and my homework and the world. At times, I even took that transistor radio to bed with me; I put it right there by the pillow. (But please don't tell my mother. She's 88 years old but still carries a big stick, and I am sure she never found out I did that.)

I did have some problems however, with my radio. It was difficult to tune in some of the stations most of the time, and most of the stations some of the time. There was a lot of static in those days. It would drift off of the set frequency, and so I had difficulty listening clearly. It was still, however, quite a miracle, to hear even the static filled words coming from the world outside my home. But I did have to work at it, always adjusting the radio dials lest I miss some of the meaningful words of one of the songs of the day, like "ooo-eee-ooo-ah-ah-ah, ting, tang, walla, bing-bang." Or that very last batter for the Phillies, ". . . and that's the final out, the Phillies lose ten in a row." But even with the static, I could hear some of what was said, some of the time. But then time moved on. FM radio arrived in earnest, and my little AM transistor radio was obsolete. It still worked, but now it was missing many of the words on the airways because I didn't have access to them. You see, life and listening had moved on.

This Second Sunday after the Epiphany presents us with three readings that signal God's presence in the world and challenge us to see if by getting in tune, if we can just get on the right frequency, if we can just be lead to be on the right frequency, we might hear God's words of challenge for us, what God is doing in the world, and would like to do in our lives.

Our first reading tells the tale of the struggle of a young apprentice and an old priest to decipher God's message to get on the frequency together so they all came to understanding of God's word. In the Corinthian text, Paul struggles to hear God's message in a world that is on a different wavelength in regard to human sexuality and embodiment. And in the Gospel reading,

Phillip and Nathaniel find that they are making serious adjustments in the range of self-understanding as they seek to fine-tune their theological understanding of Jesus. Nathaniel is drawn to Jesus precisely because of Jesus' high definition, full-color imaging of Nathaniel's whereabouts and activity, in particular under the fig tree.

It seems that nowadays we have a wider range of reception than ever before. God is presented to us not just in mere words for hearing, but through multimedia extravaganzas. Yet I wonder if we will be any more successful in picking up the message and meaning that God conveying to us.

I still remember the time when my family purchased its first television set, so color television still holds some amazement for me. I am no less astounded now than then, that the background static of life can be penetrated and we can find a word, especially God's word, coming through loudly and clearly, if we are attentive to that word. We may even discover in the fullness of time God overrides all of the background noise and comes through very loud and very clear, even through the most humble transistor radio, even through the most humble human being. Indeed on most days, it seems, the Spirit works to help us tune in to God's words for us, leading us to places we ourselves would never have thought of going before.

Consider Don. His youth group planned a service project at a local nursing home. The instructions were simple: each member of the youth group would be partnered with a resident in the nursing home. In other words, they would visit, they would talk. Don was less than enthused about the whole idea. Several times he told the group leader he would rather have another project to participate in; he said he would rather do something else as a service project, but he wasn't sure what that might be. The youth leader explained that serving others was a good thing, and that visiting someone in a nursing home would be a wonderful form of service, that he would learn to enjoy it, and anyway, that's the project they were all going to do.

On the appointed day, Don stood in front of the door to the nursing home and knocked rather tentatively. As he knocked, he heard someone in the room say "Come." And then as soon as he entered, the woman sitting in a chair said to him, "Sit down." Just like that, "sit down." And then, "My name is Helen." Helen asked him some questions – if he had brothers and sisters, and what about his parents?

Then she started to tell her story, about her own family, and how she had grown up on a farm. She had many stories to tell. Don listened attentively and actually started to enjoy himself. When he went back to the youth group after that experience, he actually tried to talk other kids who had resisted, into visiting the nursing home. Don found her story so very interesting. He had never thought of an older person as having enjoyed the same things he did; admittedly, he did not have much contact with older people.

It seems, at first, that Don wasn't very tuned into what God had in mind for him concerning the youth project. He may not have seen the encouragement of the youth group leader, or the forbearance of Helen herself, as God's way of nudging him. But maybe he will be less fearful the next time such a new opportunity to hear God's call comes along, and be tuned in to it.

In our first reading, the confused boy Samuel and experience priest Eli need to tune in to God's call for specific activity. In the second reading, a group of confused Corinthian Christians need to better tune in to God's call to use their physical bodies in ways that are beneficial and give glory to God. And in our Gospel, Nathaniel needs to overcome his prejudgments and accept Phillip's invitation to "come and see," that he might tune in to God's new activity through God's Son. Maybe that's why some people don't tune in to God too readily – it means something new is happening, and it might just mean that God has something new in mind for an individual, some new vocation.

The word "vocation" comes from the Latin *vocare*, "to call." It means the work a person is called by God to do. There are various kinds of voices calling us to do many types of work. The task is to discover, to tune in to, which is truly the voice of God, rather of the culture, society, or ego, or self-interest.

Frederick Buechner, in *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*, puts it this way. "By and large a good rule for finding out is this. The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work that (a) you need most to do and (b) the world most needs to have done. If you really get a kick out of your work, you presumably met requirement (a), but if your work is writing television deodorant commercials, the chances are you've missed requirement (b). On the other hand, if your work is being a doctor in a leper colony, you have probably met requirement (b), but if most of the time you're bored and depressed by it, chances are you have not only bypassed requirement (a), and you probably aren't helping your patients much, either." He then sums it up like this: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

This should not just be thought of as one would a job one does from working age until retirement, but as a daily invitation in which the Spirit of God molds us to live out of our baptism in a thousand little and large ways. We need to become in tune with this.

Ernest Campbell, former preaching minister at Riverside Church in New York City, tells the story of the start-up of color television in Germany. The initial response was frustration at not being able to pick up the color signals. Intense investigation led to the discovery that many did not know they actually had to buy color television sets in order to pick up the new advance in television entertainment. In some sense, the Gospel of John deals with the difficulty of picking up God's signals that something new is about to happen in one's life. We too often have great difficulty reorienting and redirecting our minds and hearts in order to understand what God is doing. We have the right equipment to do it, and the Spirit is working with us. Still, we need to get beyond our black and white thinking.

This Gospel lesson describes two disciples whose ability to interpret things is somewhat behind the curve. Similarly, in trying to change frequencies, the church has often played catch up. It took several hundred years for the church to gain clarity on the nature of Jesus and the meaning of the Trinity (we're still working on it). From time to time, we have made several adjustments to pick up the frequency on which God is broadcasting. Sometimes we can only find the frequency by changing where we frequent. Either way, adjustments are going to occur. Nathaniel seems like so many people who have the wrong geographic fix, expecting little good

to come out of minuscule backwoods towns such as Nazareth. Tourist guides in modern Nazareth point out that the entire town in Jesus' day would fit inside the current Roman Catholic Basilica in Rome; that's a little town. Perhaps at times, we don't do any better at discerning what God is doing because we have our own "frequent frequency" problem.

Nathaniel is astounded that Jesus already knows where he has been spending his time. Like many of the characters in John's Gospel, Nathaniel is amazed but he still does not quite pick up on where Jesus is coming from. Calling him "rabbi" is a good start, but it falls short. Going on to call him "Son of God" is getting better. But then turning the dial to "King of Israel" presents some difficulty. It poses problems in John's story. He's drifting off frequency. You see, Jesus in the Gospel of John withdraws when the crowd wants to make him king by force.

In a sense, Nathaniel "ain't seen nothin' yet" and what he does see is not yet fully in focus. The story we have is in progress, it's not finished. It will take some movement in the plot before we know that Jesus' throne will be a cross, and that the spirit will pour forth from this life and from these events in a saving act that will take away the sin of the entire world.

There is no doubt at a certain level, that we can see that Jesus is special, that he is a teacher who merits our attention. However, if we stay at this level we have not seen anything yet, and we may have to change our frequency if we're going to get this story live and in living color. And like Samuel and Eli, and the Corinthian Christians, and Nathaniel, we will need to be attentive to God's continuing call, to believe in God's radical concern for us, and to be about God's business in this world. Ever there is something new, something bold, something challenging, so we need to stay tuned; indeed, we need to be part of what is going on.

In a little while we will install here a new Spiritual Gifts Coordinator. As we stay tuned for God's word, I would like you to keep in mind, listen closely if Judy happens to call you on the telephone and asks you to use some of your spiritual gifts in God's service – just keep in mind, it might not be just Judy who is calling.