

**Second Sunday of Epiphany (Confession of St. Peter)**  
**January 17, 2021 – St. Clement’s**  
**1 Samuel 3:1-10, Psalm 139, John 1:43-51**  
**The Rev. Peggy Trendell-Jensen**

Well, it’s official. Christmas is over. In the church’s liturgical year, once we have celebrated the baptism of Jesus, as we did last Sunday, we are thrust into the first week of Ordinary Time, whether we are ready for it or not. We leave behind the season of Christmas, but we are not yet approaching the season of Lent. It’s a very January kind of place to be.

In his long poem, *For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio*, W.H. Auden captures that post-holiday feeling well:

Well, so that is that.  
Now we must dismantle the tree,  
Putting the decorations back into their cardboard boxes --  
Some have got broken -- and carrying them up to the attic.  
The holly and the mistletoe must be taken down and burnt,  
And the children got ready for school.

There are enough  
Left-overs to do, warmed-up, for the rest of the week --  
Not that we have much appetite, having drunk such a lot,  
Stayed up so late, attempted -- quite unsuccessfully --  
To love all of our relatives, and in general  
Grossly overestimated our powers. Once again  
As in previous years we have seen the actual Vision and failed  
To do more than entertain it as an agreeable  
Possibility, once again we have sent Him away,  
Begging though to remain His disobedient servant,  
The promising child who cannot keep His word for long.

The Christmas Feast is already a fading memory,  
And already the mind begins to be vaguely aware  
Of an unpleasant whiff of apprehension at the thought  
Of Lent and Good Friday which cannot, after all, now  
Be very far off.

Just for fun, I googled the term “January blues,” and there are, apparently, 253,000,000 references to these seasonal doldrums out there on the world wide web. So if you do happen to be having a case of post-Christmas let down, be reassured, at least, that you are not alone.

It was a couple of lines in today’s readings, in fact, that started me thinking about the January blues.

In the beginning of the reading from Samuel, it says: “The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.” Any of us who spend too much time following disheartening news stories and tales of political self-interest can probably relate. There are times when vision seems thin on the ground indeed.

And in the gospel text, Nathanael is inclined to doubt that vision or anything else very noteworthy can come out of a tiny, two-bit town so far from the action of Jerusalem. “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” he asks doubtfully. It is, after all, such an ordinary little place.

But these readings go on to remind us that that there is no “ordinary” time with God. And, in fact, the Church doesn’t consider this time in the liturgical calendar “ordinary” in the way we usually think of the word. *Ordinary*, in this case, is a reference to the ordinal numbers used to list the Sundays in the church year. So this Sunday is called the Second Sunday after Epiphany, the next is the Third Sunday, and so on. And during the second stretch of Ordinary Time, the Sundays after Pentecost are numbered just the same way. The dictionary tells us that ordinal numbers are simply numbers that are used to list something.

But it is the case that these periods of Ordinary Time are neither a lead up to, nor an extended celebration of, the high holy days of Easter and Christmas. So it is understandable that we may find ourselves thinking of these days and weeks as somehow less important, less inspiring, less fruitful. And in this wintery stretch of Ordinary Time, when the evenings are dark and the days often dreary, we may be even more inclined to slip into a spiritual slump.

But we remember the verse in today’s psalm: “Darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day; darkness and light to you are both alike.” From God’s perspective, not one moment exists that is not rich with meaning, potential and purpose. We think of the ancient Greek word *kairos* used often in the New Testament, referring to God’s opportune time of active intervention. And while we humans may think more often in terms of *kronos* – that is, chronological time, the kind that can pass very slowly and glumly indeed – I would like to think that there is no hour, day or week that does not offer us the chance to align our spirit more closely with God’s.

So during these fallow days of winter, let us remember that God never sleeps. Farmers, as you will recall, let a field lie fallow to recover from sowing and plowing so the earth might regain its rich fertility and be ever more receptive when seeds are next planted. And so it is with us. It is a time in which we are challenged to allow ourselves to get bored and fretful and then emerge on the other side having learned the discipline of stillness and of rest. It is perhaps then that we are best able to sense the Holy Spirit working away below the surface. Perhaps then that we might start to understand different perspectives, wake up with new energy, ask better questions, feel the stirrings of new vocation.

Eli understood this. When Samuel thought he had heard the priest calling him in the night, I appreciate that Eli didn't say "you must have been hearing things." Eli denied having called out himself, but he didn't try to convince Samuel he was wrong altogether. Nor did he push Samuel into action; even when Samuel twice reported hearing voices, Eli didn't say, why don't you put on your house coat and have a look round outside in the yard. Both times, Eli just sent him back to bed, to his resting place. And when it happened a third time, and Eli realized this was a call from God, even then he didn't counsel action. He didn't say put on your best nightshirt, or prepare a sacrifice, or make sure your room is tidy in case God comes round again. Eli tells Samuel to go back to bed and next time to answer God simply: "Speak, for your servant is listening." That's good advice for all of us as we rest in the quiet of Ordinary Time.

The Confession of St. Peter the Apostle, which we remember today and which is why we don't have the green of ordinary time reflected on our altar hangings and stoles, is told in Matthew 16. In this passage, the disciples report to Jesus what people in the crowd are saying about him – some believed Jesus to be John the Baptist, or a return of Elijah or another prophet. Jesus asks them, "But who do you think I am?" and Peter confidently answers: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Well, we might think, that's easy for him to say. Peter had, after all, been eyewitness to any number of miracles by that time – he had seen Jesus calm a storm, walk on water, feed thousands from a handful of food, and heal the sick and the lame – including Peter's own mother-in-law. But the only reason Peter experienced all these miracles close to hand was because one very ordinary day, when a very ordinary-looking man came along and said "Follow me," Peter said *yes*. There were no angels; no trumpets. But Peter was willing to allow for the possibility that the extraordinary had intersected with the ordinary right in front of his nose. He and his brother left their nets and embarked on a spiritual adventure they could never have anticipated.

We don't know why Jesus chose Peter for great things that day. But we do know that each of us is invited to play some role in giving life to God's kingdom on earth. We may not always know what part we will play, or what task we will be given. But as Philip says to Nathanael in the gospel, "Come and see."

Albert Schweitzer, the theologian awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952, said this:

He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside. He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: "Follow thou me!" and sets us the tasks which he has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they will pass through in his fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience who He is.

Over Christmastide and Epiphany, we celebrate the glorious signs that point to Christ as Messiah – the star over Bethlehem; the witness of the magi at the stable; the voice of God sounding over Jesus’s baptism. And now, as we enter this season of Ordinary Time, we are called to remain alert for the continuing signs of Christ’s majesty in the world. They may not be announced by angels, but for all who have eyes to see them the signs are right there amidst the magic of everyday life. Or, as Auden more poetically concludes his *Christmas Oratorio*:

He is the Way.  
Follow him through the Land of Unlikeness;  
You will see rare beasts, and have unique adventures.

He is the Truth.  
Seek Him in the Kingdom of Anxiety;  
You will come to a great city that has expected your return for years.

He is the Life.  
Love Him in the World of the Flesh;  
And at your marriage all its occasions shall dance for joy.

My friends, here’s to Ordinary Time, and all the miracles contained therein.