

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

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1 Samuel 3:1-10,(11-20)

NRSV

Hannah, Samuel's mother, barren for many years, has given her son to the service of the Lord in thanksgiving for his gift of a child. He serves Eli in the temple at Shiloh. (Jerusalem is not yet an Israelite city.) For many years (during the period of the *judges*), revelations from God ("word", "visions", v. 1) were rare. The "lamp of God" (v. 3) burned throughout the night (per Exodus 27:21), near the Ark, so it was not yet morning. Perhaps Samuel lay near the lamp to tend it. God calls Samuel, as he had Moses, Gideon and Samson. Samuel thinks it is Eli who is calling him (vv. 5, 6); he does not recognize God's voice because he had not come into direct contact with him (v. 7a); it is Eli who realizes that God is calling the boy (v. 8c). Samuel then acknowledges God's call.

Vv. 11-14 and 2:27-36 probably explain why the priests in later times were descended from Zadok and not from Eli: his sons were *a bad lot*: see 2:12-26. Samuel was later recognized as a prophet, and God continued to appear to him at Shiloh.

Psalm 139:1-6,13-18

NRSV

The part of this psalm used today is a hymn praising God for his knowledge of all (vv. 1-6) and of the psalmist (vv. 13-18). God has "searched" (v. 1) the psalmist and known him. (Knowing his *sitting down* and *rising up* is a Semitism for knowing him completely.) God knows everything he thinks and his "ways" (v. 3). God finds him wherever he goes, for God is everywhere; the psalmist couldn't escape from God even if he tried (vv. 7-12). God knows him because he created him (v. 13). In v. 14, he praises God for the wonders of his works, particularly for the mystery of the creation of humankind. The "depths of the earth" (v. 15) is a figure for the womb, perhaps reflecting the second creation story (Genesis 2:7). Then v. 16: either God knew the length of the psalmist's life before he was born, or he knew his character from the moment of conception. That God keeps a record of humankind is found in several psalms, and elsewhere. V. 17 is an exclamation of wonder. To count all God's thoughts, the psalmist would need to live for ever (v. 18).

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

NRSV

In Paul's day, Corinth was known for licentiousness. He is concerned that some Christians have gone beyond liberty, that their ways are destroying the community. He quotes a slogan from his opponents: "All things are lawful for me". (They are saying *I can do anything I like*.) He does not disagree – for Christian living does not depend on observing a set of rules, but on God who accepts even those who break his laws – but he adds a qualification: some things may not be

"beneficial" for the person or in the community. He adds a second qualification: that he will not become enslaved to any indulgence. Christian liberty is not license. V. 13a is a quotation from his opponents which Paul appears to accept (Christians are not subject to Jewish food laws), but he adds a *rider*: "and one day God will put an end to both" (Revised English Bible): both are transitory. But, on the other hand, Paul says, realizing the Corinthian corollary to the quotation (that desires of the body can be satisfied in any way we wish), the physical and spiritual "body" (meaning the whole person and how he lives) is not meant for self-indulgence, because of the relationship between Christ and each person: our bodies are clearly important to God because, as he has raised Christ, so he will raise us. So his opponents are wrong in their analogy between "stomach" and "body". The body is intended for the service of the Lord.

He continues (v. 15): surely you are aware of this relationship. In v. 16, he quotes Genesis 2:24: "... a man ... clings to his wife, and they become one flesh". You must be aware that you are "members of Christ" (v. 15), each of you "united" (v. 17) to him, and so are his. So how can I possibly unite you with a "prostitute" (v. 16), for union occurs in sexual intercourse. Immorality cannot be compartmentalized, for it involves the whole person. So, "shun fornication!" (v. 18) Again v. 18b ("Every sin ...") is a quotation, suggesting that the actions of the flesh have no relationship to the spirit ("body"). Paul rejects this view. Surely, he says in v. 19, you know that your "body" (spiritual and physical) is sacred and belongs to Christ ("you are not your own"). For Christ "bought" (v. 20) you with his blood, ransomed you as a slave or prisoner is ransomed. So pay homage to God by living in a godly way, using the body for its intended purpose sexually, but also to serve others.

John 1:43-51

NRSV

On the previous day, Andrew and Peter, both disciples of John the Baptist, have become Jesus' disciples. The Baptist has said to them: "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" (v. 36) They have asked Jesus: "Where are you staying?" (v. 38, where do you dwell?); he has answered "Come and see" (v. 39): a command that means, in this gospel, *come and believe*. It was Andrew who found Peter. Philip finds Nathanael (probably *Bartholomew* of the other gospels), and tells him that the three have found the one to whom the Old Testament points, i.e. Jesus, the Messiah (v. 45). Nathanael's response (v. 46) is probably a local proverb: the people of Nazareth were despised. Philip says "Come and see", as Jesus did to Andrew and Peter. An "Israelite" (v. 47) embraced the legal and prophetic books; Nathanael is a "truly an Israelite" because, unlike other Jews, he goes further: he accepts Christ. Jacob, the father of the nation, practised deceit before meeting God, but in Nathanael "there is no deceit". In v. 49, Nathanael acknowledges Christ for who he is – in Jewish terms, because of the *minor miracle* of Jesus observing him under a fig tree on a previous occasion, before they met. Jesus tells him that he will see a much greater miracle: like the one Jacob saw in his dream at Bethel (Genesis 28:10-17), but with the Son of Man, Jesus, being the vehicle of communication. In today's psalm, God knows our doings; here Jesus knows Nathanael.

