

John 1: 43-51

LECTIONARY READINGS: 1 Samuel 3: 1-20; Psalm 139: 1-6. 13-18; 1 Corinthians 6: 12-20; John 1: 43-51

PRAYER: INSISTENT GOD, BY NIGHT AND DAY YOU SUMMON YOUR SLUMBERING PEOPLE, SO STIR US WITH YOUR VOICE AND ENLIGHTEN OUR LIVES WITH YOUR GRACE THAT WE GIVE OURSELVES FULLY TO CHRIST'S CALL TO MISSION AND MINISTRY. AMEN.

GOD IS GOING TO DO A NEW THING, SO LARGE THAT IT WILL MAKE US TINGLE. AND GOD IS GOING TO DO IT THROUGH A YOUNG BOY. GOD IS GOING TO GIVE US PINS AND NEEDLES AND USE A CHILD AS THE DELIVERY SYSTEM. THIS STORY FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT SOUNDS A LOT LIKE THE CHRISTMAS STORY DOESN'T IT?

MY DAILY DEVOTION RECENTLY INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING STORY: "THE LAST TIME I FELT A TINGLE WAS WHEN A TWO-YEAR-OLD VISITED OUR HOUSE AND PLAYED WITH OUR CAT. IN THE MIDDLE OF OUR LIVING ROOM IS A LARGE OTTOMAN. SIX CHAIRS AND A COUCH SURROUND THE OTTOMAN, ON WHICH MANY PEOPLE PUT UP THEIR FEET. ON THIS PARTICULAR EVENING THE CIRCLE WAS COMFORTABLY MADE AROUND THE OTTOMAN, AND ONLY THE CHILD AND I KNEW THAT THE CAT WAS HIDING UNDER IT. THE CHILD KEPT CONFIRMING HIS WISDOM, GIGGLING AND POINTING OUT THAT THE CAT WAS UNDER THE OTTOMAN. THE ADULTS WERE AMUSED FOR A WHILE, THEN TIRED OF THE GAME, AND WENT ON IN THEIR OWN PURSUITS. THE CHILD KEPT PULLING UP THE UPHOLSTERED SKIRT OF THE OTTOMAN AND GIGGLING. THINGS MOVED ON. WE ATE SOME MORE. THE CHILD BUILT A FEW BLOCKS AND KNOCKED THEM OVER. THEN THE CHILD RETURNED TO THE OTTOMAN, AND THE CAT WAS NOT THERE. DISASTER ENSUED. THE CHILD BEGAN CRYING UNCONTROLLABLY AND HAD TO BE COMFORTED, AFTER WHICH HE WENT BACK TO HIS BLOCKS. THEN I SAW THE CAT SLIP UNDER THE OTTOMAN.

I TOLD THE CAT'S SECRET TO THE CHILD. THE BOY LIFTED THE SKIRT, BEGAN TO GIGGLE, RUN BACK AND FORTH, YELL, SCREAM, CARRY ON, AND TINGLE WITH THE JOY HE HAD IN FINDING THE CAT. I FOUND IT CONTAGIOUS AND ADDED MY PINS AND NEEDLES TO HIS EXCITEMENT. GOD IS IN THE HEAVENS, AND ALL IS POSSIBLY RIGHT WITH THE WORLD. THAT LITTLE FELINE EXPERIENCE CARRIED ME A LONG WAY TOWARD UNDERSTANDING WHAT HAPPENED WITH ELI AND SAMUEL AND GOD. I DO NOT KNOW MUCH ABOUT TINGLE---AND JUST THIS LITTLE BIT HELPED ME UNDERSTAND THE MAGNITUDE OF THE VISITATION OF "TINGLE."

IN OUR STORY FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT THIS MORNING WE MEET A PRIEST NAMED ELI WHO NO LONGER EXPECTS TO SEE OR HEAR ANYTHING FROM GOD. NOT BECAUSE GOD HAS

ABANDONED HIM, BUT BECAUSE HE CAN'T FIND THE COURAGE, THE WILL, AND MORAL FORTITUDE TO DO WHAT GOD DESIRES.

ELI AND SAMUEL'S ENCOUNTER WEAVES TOGETHER AN OLD MAN AND YOUNG BOY'S EXPERIENCE OF HEARING GOD'S VISION FOR A NEW ISRAEL. THEY ARE UNSURE AT FIRST THAT SOMETHING REAL IS HAPPENING. THE OLD MAN KNOWS THE WAYS OF THE LORD AND GUIDES SAMUEL TO LISTEN IN. ELI SENSES THE POSSIBILITY OF FORGIVENESS---OR AT LEAST AN END TO HIS MOURNING---AND LISTENS. SAMUEL "DID NOT YET KNOW THE LORD" BUT FINDS HIS WAY BY A SUPERB GUIDE. THE NEWS IS SAID TO "TINGLE". "I AM ABOUT TO DO SOMETHING..THAT WILL MAKE BOTH EARS OF ANYONE WHO HEARS IT TINGLE." (3:11).

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU FELT A "TINGLE" ABOUT THE WORD OF GOD TO YOU? WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU EXPERIENCED HOPE KICKING INTO HIGH GEAR, PINS AND NEEDLES ALL OVER YOUR BODY BECAUSE YOU WERE SO EXCITED ABOUT WHAT GOD IS DOING IN YOUR LIFE? WITH ITS PROMISE OF "PINS AND NEEDLES," THIS PASSAGE FROM 1 SAMUEL IS A KIND OF SPIRITUAL ACUPUNCTURE. IT BRINGS US BY WAY OF THRILLING NEWS TO A TIME OF RENEWAL AND FORGIVENESS.

OFTEN WE MAKE DECISIONS BECAUSE WE HAVE EXPERIENCED THE TINGLE OF FEAR. WE HEARD THE DOCTOR SAY THE CANCER WAS BACK, OR WE HEARD THE BOSS SAY WE WERE BEING LAID OFF AND WE WERE PUT ON FULL BODY ALERT AT THE POSSIBILITY THAT OUR PENSION WAS GOING TO BE TAKEN AWAY. WE WERE SO SCARED AT HOW CLOSE WE CAME TO HITTING THE OTHER CAR THAT WE HAD TO STOP AND REST A MINUTE IN ORDER TO EXPERIENCE OUR BODY'S ADRENALIN RUSH. FEAR IS A MASTER AT GETTING OUR FULL ATTENTION ISN'T IT?

WHAT OUR PASSAGE FROM 1 SAMUEL RECOMMENDS TO US IS THAT WE BEGIN TO MAKE DECISIONS BASED ON THE TINGLE OF HOPE. ODDLY, THE PASSAGE ASSURES US THAT WHAT GOD IS GOING TO DO WILL MAKE BOTH EARS TINGLE. I DON'T KNOW IF I CAN DO THAT....HAVE BOTH EARS TINGLE. SO LET ME OFFER THIS: LET ONE EAR TINGLE WITH FEAR. FEAR IS LEGITIMATE UNDER MOST OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF MOST OF OUR LIVES. FEAR IS SPIRITUALLY LEGITIMATE. A LOT HAS GONE WRONG. A LOT OF DANGER LURKS. BUT LISTEN WITH THE OTHER EAR. HEAR WHAT SAMUEL WAS RELUCTANT TO HEAR: GOD IS GOING TO DO A NEW THING, WHICH WILL MAKE BOTH OF OUR EARS TINGLE. GIVE THE OTHER EAR A LITTLE EXERCISE. LET IT TINGLE TOO.

CAN YOU IMAGINE A WORLD BEYOND GIMMICKS, WITH NO GOTCHAS, A WORLD WHERE THINGS ARE FAIR, WHERE YOU ARE WELL, WHERE THOSE YOU LOVE ARE WELL? EPIPHANY IS A SEASON OF LIGHT AND REVELATION, A SEASON OF SEARCHING, DISCOVERING, FINDING, AND KNOWING. WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM GOD IN THESE FIRST DAYS OF THE NEW YEAR? MAY WE LIVE BOLDLY INTO THE CALLING OF EPIPHANY. SEE. NAME. SPEAK. BLESS. GOD IS

NEAR AND GOD IS SPEAKING. GOD HAS PLANS, ALREADY EXECUTED IN JESUS, TO DO GOOD THINGS. LOOK BACK THROUGH SCRIPTURE, LOOK FORWARD IN HOPE. OPEN BOTH OF YOUR EARS FOR SOON THEY WILL TINGLE! AMEN.