

Sunday 17th January 2021 - Epiphany II

We are following our Epiphany roadway – the road that leads us from the revelation of Christ the light of the world through the season of solemnity in Lent to the eventual glorification of Christ the victor of death and destruction to the revelation of God's full and loving care for us and for everything in His creation. Today we are asking God to aid us on that journey through the gift of *'grace and the renewal of our lives'* as it says in today's Collect. We are learning, therefore, about the expected *'heavenly glory'*. The intriguing thing to notice is that all three of today's readings show us how this worked out in the lives of those who had made the journey before us.

Firstly, we hear of the young Samuel who was destined to become a great prophet and servant of the Lord God who had to learn as he *'grew up, [that] the Lord was with him and [would] let none of his words fall to the ground'*. We are told that *'all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord'*. This happened in what must have been very difficult times. The young nation had not yet focused itself in its settlement of the place that God had promised would be theirs and there was a feeling of anxiety and disturbance – people could not work out how things were going to go forward. That is expressed in the statement that *'The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread'*. That probably speaks to us at this present moment – How are we going to get out of this mess that we are in? The virus is dominant; the political and social scene at home and abroad does not offer much comfort. There seems to be a shortage of trustworthy prophecy, not just on Covid 19 but on everything. Samuel in his lifetime was able to offer a ministry of reassurance.

The Book of Revelation offers a much more cheerful scenario. It tells of many gloomy things but then it brings glowing pictures of future wonder. The hosts of heaven will *'sing a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals for ... you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth."* In the midst of darkness the light shines; the reassurance is there; the victory is within sight and in Christ all will be perfected. These are words set to draw us through the present difficulties, to set a light before us, to bring us through the difficulties and through the preparatory period that Lent is to offer us for the time when the ultimate wonder of Jesus' glorification at Eastertide.

So we come to the Gospel reading and Nathanael the sceptic being told that there are signs for him to absorb which will show him that even in times of distress and difficulty there can be knowledge of the things which change everything: *'you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending upon the Son of man.'* That must have been, for the man who Jesus was trying to win to His side, a very powerful image and he declared his immediate allegiance to Jesus and it can be for us too. We will not be looking for a staircase loaded up with figures clothed in feathered wings – we know that that is imagery given to us so that it is possible to understand that which we tend to dismiss as unknowable, impossible, even ridiculous – we know that this is another expression of the glory of God who loves us and cares for us and wants us to be in Him and with Him – it is a way of defining for us the hope that lies before us. All things are possible in Jesus to bring us to God. *'God is as He is in Jesus and so there is hope'*. The hope is the one that Epiphany brings to each one of us. Treasure it!

Crispin White