

EPIPHANY 2 B

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

The Perils of Sleeping in Church

As I read today's text from **1st. Samuel**, the thought came to me that it's kind of a dangerous thing to sleep in church...

A minister was preaching one Sunday

when she noticed a man asleep on the front pew.

She tried to ignore him but he started snoring.

So, continuing with her sermon, she made her way

slowly toward the man. Using gestures as she spoke,

she lightly struck the man on the shoulder.

But he did not wake up.

She did it again – with more force. Still no results.

Finally, she gestured more vigorously

striking the man in the back of the head

and sending him tumbling off the pew onto the floor.

He woke up, still groggy (is that a word), and said,

"Hit me again! I can still hear her!"

Sleeping in church can be a perilous thing...

All preachers have sleeping stories to tell...even the great Paul...

Just ask **Eutychus** in Acts 20...

this young man was sitting in the window

while Paul preached away until almost midnight...

the young man fell fast asleep

and promptly fell headfirst out the window...

they thought he was dead...but Paul went down to him

and said that life was still in him...

In the text for today we see another one sleeping in the temple

at Shiloh...young Samuel...probably about 12 years old...

brought there years before by his mother Hannah.

Samuel, sleeping beside the Ark of the Covenant,

the most holy object in all of Israel,

is awakened by a voice in the night...

he meets and hears God for the first time...

he is called...his first task is not a pleasant one...

to tell Eli some bad news...

It was while he was in the Temple in Jerusalem
that Isaiah heard that same voice, and he replied, as did Samuel,
"Here I Am, Lord..." and took on the perilous task
of being a prophet to a people who wanted no prophets...

You see, the peril isn't really sleeping in church,
unless you happen to be sitting in a window
or you tend to nod and your pastor has a habit
of making vigorous arm gestures....

No, the peril, the danger is,
that you just might encounter the Living God...
you may **"wake up"** to the sound of a voice
making claims on your life...calling you to difficult tasks
to make a difference in your world...

I think this is the reason we come to church –
for we are seeking God, we need to hear God's voice,
to connect and reconnect with the Divine;
and perhaps this is the reason
why so many choose **not to come** –

it is an awesome thing to seek God –

for we discover that God is seeking us....

Parents, it is a perilous thing we do

in bringing our children to church...as did Hannah with Samuel...

for we risk that they will hear

that same voice in the night calling them...

that they will meet a God who values them...

who makes them aware of their gifts

and the need to use those gifts to make a difference....

I understand that Andrew Young's daughter,

whom he had taken to church all his life,

one day felt a call to go to a mission work

(I believe in Africa) ... and this made him worry ...

he had not thought such a thing would happen....

It is a perilous thing coming to church...to the house of God...

for when you come to anyone's house, and do it often enough,

you are likely to run into them!

This is not to limit God to any one time or place.

But there is something special, sacred, about our shrines in Shiloh,
no matter if they be huts or cathedrals....

They are places hallowed

by the prayers and praises of God's people...

and, such a place is a good place to begin looking for God,
listening for God's voice...!

It was in my own Church, a church in Syracuse, New York

that my mother faithfully brought me to when I was a child,

that I began to hear God's voice...

telling me I was special...calling me to ministry....

And today, in this perilous place, we hear the call of Jesus,

not just to Nathaniel, but to each of us...to our whole church...

to risk it all...to follow him...to let him set our agenda,

to establish our priorities...to lead us to difficult tasks

that will make a difference.

But he calls and he promises,

"Come, follow me...you ain't seen nothing yet!"

And let us reply, ***"Here we are, Lord..."*** Amen.