

The connecting thread running through each of the readings for today is the word *know*. I will comment briefly on what it means to know in each reading and what such knowing means for us today.

The word of the Lord was rare when Samuel served Eli in the Temple, visions were not widespread. When Eli finally catches on to what is going on he instructs Samuel to respond, *Speak, Lord, for you servant is listening*.

Eli's blindness reflects not only his decrepitude but his incapacity for vision. Samuel had not yet experienced the Lord; the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. Eli's incapacity and Samuel's call represents a transition from priestly to prophetic leadership in Israel.

When the priests failed to teach the people the way of the Lord, the prophets called the people to renewed obedience. The condemnation of Eli and his sons is not the result of ritual inattentiveness but of moral and ethical failure. They abused their privileged position for personal gain and self-gratification.

Prophet after prophet will chastise Israel for failing to live justly with the poor, which is also a failure to live faithfully before God. Theology and ethics are inseparable.

Paul asks the Corinthians, "Do you not *know* that your bodies are members of Christ?" This is the seventh time in this letter that Paul begins a question with, *Do you not know*.  
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The Corinthians suffered from two kinds of moral failures, both rooted in seeking self-gratification. One involved what is off-limits sexually; the other, what is off-limits in terms of justice and property rights. Funny how we accent the first and forget the later.

The Corinthians believed freedom from the law meant liberty to do all things, to do anything. When freedom is absolutized, bondage follows. It is a well known paradox that if everyone claims unqualified autonomy, no one can be free, for everyone is threatened by the freedoms of others. As my father used to say, *My freedom ends where your nose begins*.

Paul proposes a change of starting point. He transposes debates about "liberty" and "what is permissible" into the different key of "what is helpful." Not everything is helpful.

The Christian is to share Christ's concern for the well-being of the other, and to let go of his or her own freedoms in order to liberate the other. Paul's notion of freedom challenges the assumption, "It's my life, I'll do as I please," with *Your life is not your own; it belongs to God*.

Nathaniel wants to *know* how Jesus *knows* him, since they have never met. Jesus' *seeing* Nathaniel is more than simply observing or catching sight of him. To be seen by Jesus is to be known by him. When Jesus sees Simon Peter, he renames him based on who he *will* be. When Jesus sees Nathaniel he sees his heart; he sees an Israelite without deceit.

Jesus judged Nathaniel by the content of his character. That is what Martin Luther King wanted for his four little children, to live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. Judging as Jesus judges, and not according to our prejudices, remains a dream unfulfilled.

The imagery of a vision promised to Nathaniel is taken from the story of Jacob, the deceitful one. Jacob dreams of a ladder between heaven and earth on which God's angels went up and down (Genesis 28:10-17). In the dream, the veil between heaven and earth is lifted and Jacob knows as he is known.

Nathaniel is impressed that Jesus knows him. Jesus promises that he hasn't seen anything yet. A time will come when Nathaniel will see heaven opened, as Jacob did, and will see and know Jesus as Jesus sees and knows him.

The word *know* appears seven times in Psalm 139, the number that indicates fullness or completion, reinforcing the message that the psalmist is fully and completely known by God. The psalmist knows himself to be encompassed in a divine reality.

Our lives derive from God, belong to God, and find their true destination in God's purposes. The God of all creation knows us fully, embraces us completely, and will never let us go, not even in death.