

*John 1: 43-51          1 Samuel 3:1-10          'The word of the Lord was rare in those days;visions were not widespread'. (1 Samuel 3: 1)*

I lack the sort of imagination to be an artist, but I do know that artists must have a vision of what they are trying to create before they put brush to canvas or cut into a piece of stone. Young children will make little progress without a developing vision of what they hope to achieve in their life. No political party can win an election unless they present the electors with a vision of the world they want to create. We all need people with vision to inspire us, otherwise we get nowhere; as the book of Proverbs puts it, '[Where there is no vision, the people perish](#)'.

These words from the first book of Samuel show us a sad society, without purpose, and with no clear idea of why they were there. '[The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread](#)'(1 Samuel 3:1). God was speaking to them; but nobody listened to the divine voice. They wandered aimlessly, like people lost in the fog, with no-one to point them in the right direction.

The only one who did hear God speaking to him was a small child, Samuel, a servant to Eli the priest. Samuel carried out menial tasks in the courts of the Jerusalem Temple - the last person you'd have expected God to use as his mouthpiece! An unlikely candidate to become a maker of kings!

Twice God called Samuel. Only at the third call did Eli recognise that it must be God speaking. This time, Samuel answered the voice, saying, '[Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening](#)'. Then God revealed what was going to happen to his nation and to its leaders. It was a grim warning, because they had ignored God's words, and had tried to run the country with no vision of what God had called them to do.

Let's fast forward 3000 years and think about the world we know. Would we say that the word of the Lord is still rare and that visions are still not widespread? Does our country, does Europe, have a clear understanding of its place in the world and about the purpose of human life? If not, let's remember, 'where there is no vision, the people perish'.

We appear to have built a merely materialistic view of the world - where what makes people admired is what they have, not what and who they are. We've relegated religion to yesterday's idea - an obsolete, pre-scientific delusion, which no thinking person could possibly believe. After all, to get on, to achieve recognition, these days, it seems obvious to many that the goal is to maximise your financial income and cultivate relationships with those currently holding powerful positions and wielding influence.

The voices advising us that there is more to living than material existence are drowned out by the disdain and scoffing of atheists. But if there's no God, is there any purpose to life other than our being totally focussed and self-centred as we climb to the top - on the shoulders of those less fortunate or weaker than us.

Isn't it true that spiritual life is withering away and the soul of society is dying from lack of nourishment? Yet we know that Jesus told us clearly that man shall not live by bread alone - life is not all about satisfying our every demand.

God created us because he wanted creatures who would respond to his love, by loving him with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, and by loving our neighbour as we love ourselves. That's the meaning of human life - in fact, the real meaning of God's universe. If only people today would hear that word - God's word of love, and catch the vision of what the world could be if, like Samuel, we concentrated our efforts on working hard to build the kingdom of God. But where do we begin?

In our reading from John's Gospel, we read how Jesus called Philip. A perfectly ordinary person, who sees Jesus and finds in him what he's been looking for, someone to whom he can relate and who seems to have a completely new outlook on life. Philip's response is to follow Jesus but he wants to share his good news. He goes to look for Nathaniel and tell him about this Jesus, but when Nathaniel hears Jesus is from Nazareth, where a Roman garrison was based, he's very sceptical. ['Don't just take my word for it, Philip tells him; come and see him for yourself'.](#)

We can't let people's prejudices get in the way of their meeting Christ. We all have the need for love and when we find Christ, when he calls us, we must not keep that love to ourselves. His love compels us to share our faith. Like Samuel, it may take

us some time to identify who it is who's speaking to us, but the important thing is to be on the alert. To recognise that God is everywhere and can speak to us anywhere or through whoever he chooses.

But how can we recognise God at work? Well, its a good start for us to notice God in our daily lives; by listening, looking, and expectantly searching for what he's doing and to thank him for being with us. Then, like Samuel, let's listen to what he's saying to us - and act on it. We will find that while we were looking for God, he was with us all the time, urging us on to be what we were intended to be, his friends, disciples, and builders of his kingdom. That's God's vision for us, revealed in the life of his Son.

The next time someone tells you or I that they don't believe in Jesus and don't need to go to church, why not do as Philip did with Nathaniel. Tell them that we've found in Jesus the love we've been looking for and that in the church we've found love and acceptance, which has given meaning to our life - and then invite them to come and see for themselves. But remember, we, as Christ's body here, must be a loving and welcoming community all the time, as we don't know when our call will come.

All around us, people are trying to make sense of a world which seems to be spiralling out of control for lack of compassionate leadership and of confidence in the future. Jesus came into such a world and showed us how to realise God's vision for his people, relating to and caring for individuals, but changing their world. He's still offering us the opportunity to help him in his work.

Let's be ready when God gets in touch. Amen