

The older I'm blessed to become, the more I value the depths of things rather than skimming surfaces. I remember a richness in college when departments started offering interdisciplinary courses: literature, the arts, history, religion, science engaging topics together rather than separately.

This is happening today with the climate crisis. We absolutely need such breadth and depth if we're to manage the storms ahead. The climate crisis raises religious questions. How do we faithfully honor God as Creator?

It also has roots in history and science. Yet it's the arts, literature, and faith that might lead in inspiring people to do the work needed – like the seeing the awesome James Webb photos of space and hearing classical music in a jellyfish aquarium. It's moving.

We often need to be moved inwardly to find empathy to act outwardly. It may be that the arts, including music and faith are modes that calm us enough – still our fears and comfort our souls so empathy can emerge rather than fear or paralysis.

I've thought of this as I've engaged the trained therapists voluntarily among us at LCM. They share this interdisciplinary interest – humbly sitting at the feet of God's word in community and sharing insights from brain science. What a gift!

Because of illnesses, we've postponed today's workshop until next month, but we're not waiting to swim in interdisciplinary waters. Today's scriptures dive right in – intersecting body, mind, and spirit. 1st Samuel 3, Psalm 139, and John, chapter one – all interrelate psyche and spirit.

In 1st Samuel, the boy Samuel doesn't yet know God as an addressing, living presence who can and does speak into our lives. The elder in 1st Samuel, Eli, has known this – though he seems to have forgotten.

But when Samuel, the boy, gets an inkling God might, in fact, have a voice, and be a being yearning for relationship, old Eli guides young Samuel to LISTEN! “Don't be afraid,” Eli advises. Don't pooh-pooh what you hear, or push it away, or disbelieve it. Engage it. Respond, *“Here I am. Speak. Your servant is listening.”* Then actually listen.

The power of 1st Samuel is that the boy Samuel listens, making himself available to the engagements of God. And life is never the same again.

If we read on in Samuel we learn that he, like old Eli, forgets about listening as he grows older, but for a while he listens and in listening, shows a willingness to partner with what God was up to in his day.

The invitation is for us too. Will we allow listening to move us past fear or paralysis to costly engagement with what God is up to? This is some of what is before us for next Sunday's Vision and Reports Meeting. It's not just about history. It's about listening for God's Voice.

Psalm 139 has a similar theological/psychological view – humanity is gazed on by God with love that penetrates to the soul. The Psalmist trusts God knows us better than we know ourselves.

We also read from John's gospel of Jesus surprising unsuspecting Nathaneal. Jesus knows Nathaneal's a quality person – a knowing of the core of Nathaneal that catches Nathaneal off guard. He's not used to being really seen.

Lean into that for a moment – a stranger catches the depths of you – the youest you who you hardly know yourself. Then, John says, the word gets out: this is how God is – Emmanuel, God with us, gazing on us till we know we're created good – wonderfully made, says Psalm 139 – intricately fashioned from before we were born.

The Voice of God breaks into our lives too, by water and word, through art and song, in bread and drink given for our hearing, seeing, and tasting – if we'll heed the Psalmist's advice: *Taste and see that the Lord is good.*

In God's goodness, God chooses to work with us, and not without us, as the Reformer Martin Luther taught. God works today through our efforts. How humbling is this! God is **this** incarnate – speaking to us by life-giving Word and nurturing gifts so we can be life-giving nurturers too.

So be of good cheer in this new year. God sees the disconsolation afoot in our world. And God comes consoling us by deeply seeing us.

You've heard the saying, "God doesn't make junk." Psalm 139 says that poetically. God knows and sees all is redeemable by mercy and love.

This is the promise of the Epiphany Season where our symbol is the star – a symbol of shining that exposes and brings to light. The Epiphany is the discovery that God sees – even sees injustices and wrongs long hidden. The gift of light shining on what’s wrong is that it can then finally begin to be healed.

Jesus comes to bring all-rightness – however long it takes. God doesn’t give up when the way seems slow and long. God’s love will redeem God’s world. “Come to the mercy seat,” the song says.

And this is true for Christ’s church too. The Voice of God keeps calling us “fresh through the Word.” The Voice speaks today as to Samuel long ago and to Eli even longer ago. May we join in the listening task – like Samuel if for the first time. Or like Eli if listening is something we’ve known but has gotten sidelined by life.

The grace is that even in these days of global disconsolation, God is Emmanuel, God with us. And as our song says, *Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal*. As we sing, remember Jesus ushered in the reign of heaven. The Eucharist puts it in the palms of our hands and on our hearts.

Holy Communion is God coming in bread and drink to calm our fears. *Come to the feast of love*. It is for you.

Amen