

Third Sunday after Epiphany-Year B- The Rev. Jennifer B. Cleveland 1.21.24

Last week, if we had been here, we would have heard about the moment when a very young Samuel unexpectedly first heard God's voice. We would have heard of how God called out to Samuel, "*Hey, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle.*" The first time it happened, Samuel was quite confused and didn't know what he was hearing or what was going on, but after awhile, he finally figured out that the tingling he was hearing in his own ears wasn't tinnitus. He became a prophet. Last week, we would also have heard how Jesus went to Galilee and saw Philip and said, *Follow me*. And then we would have heard how Philip saw Nathaniel (who must have been a friend) and said, *Will you come with me?* And how Nathaniel did. Now today, we hear of Jonah hearing God's voice to go to Ninevah, and how Jesus, still in Galilee, speaks that simple invitation to Simon and Andrew, *Follow me*. And just a little while later, does the same with James and John of Zebedee.

Even though we don't hear a lot of details, we hear enough to know that each of their situations was different, yet that each of them heard God in some way that made their ears tingle. Tingle appears only three times in scripture, but just three weeks into this new year, 2024 promises plenty of tingle. The new year started off, for me, with a brief, full-body tingle after going into the water during the 4H-sponsored Polar Plunge. As most of you know, it doesn't matter what time of year you go into this water, even if you're just dipping your toes in (on purpose or by accident), the Salish Sea Tingle is real—an immediate wake up, not just to the presence of the Holy One, but to being alive in the Holy One. An immediate *Wowza* reminder of this wild creation of God's. That's one tingle in 2024.

A week ago, we didn't hear how God promised to make people's ears tingle because we became immersed in a different sort of tingling when the snow started falling and the temperatures dropped. At times over the past week-plus, your ears and fingers and toes have perhaps been tingling for different reasons, as you (we all) listened for sounds of the heat and water pipes working, put on an extra-thick pair of socks, checked in with neighbors, and stayed alert to the news. You might have experienced all sorts of tingles over the past week and a half: for the cold night beauty, for the promise of a snow day (or two or three), for concern for all those without warm, safe shelter whose exposure meant that they might become quite numb from the cold (the opposite of tingling). Ears, fingers, and toes tingle. Hearts tingle, too, and my guess is we've been tingling in all sorts of ways during the cold, snow and ice, in responding to our own needs and those of others. That's another sort of tingling in 2024.

And now, between last week and this week, there have been the briefest introductions, thumbnail sketches, to the tingling in both their ears that eight different people heard, each one different, each one at different times: Samuel, Philip, Nathaniel, Jonah, Simon, Andrew, James of Zebedee, John of Zebedee. Eight people who somehow realized that the Holy One was right there with them, inviting them to go on an unknown adventure. *Follow me*. This is only the Third Sunday after the Epiphany and the Third Sunday of 2024 and we've already heard of so much tingling!

Two weeks ago, we showed the documentary movie, *The Philadelphia Eleven*, in Campbell Hall after church. The movie is about the irregular ordination of eleven women to the priesthood on July 29, 1974, two years before the Episcopal Church officially approved the ordination of women to the priesthood at the 1976 General Convention. The documentary was filled with footage of interviews with the women from the mid-70's, as well as with interviews that were done more recently, specifically for the documentary. What stood out, in part, is that each of the Philadelphia Eleven came from different places from different backgrounds and paths. They were of different ages and stages in life. Yet each of them, as they told their individual, unique story, expressed how they had arrived at that moment, through years of study, prayer, active ministry, and discernment. Not one of the women interviewed said, *Both my ears tingled*, but that's what they were talking about. And even though their reflections were centered on what had brought them to that moment and what happened afterwards, these were mere thumbnail sketches of the eleven, who, individually, heard Jesus say, *Follow me*. So we have the eight from the readings over the past two weeks—who I am now calling the *Epiphany Eight*—whose ears tingled 2000-2600 or so years ago, from Ramah, Corinth, and Galilee. And the *Philadelphia Eleven* whose ears tingled fifty or so years ago, who came from places such as South Australia, Charlotte, NC, and Portland, OR. So much tingling.

One of the women who was not part of the Philadelphia Eleven, but who was very much involved in all that was going on at the time was Pauli Murray. Pauli Murray had been a part of many such conversations in her life. Born in 1910 in North Carolina, she had been first in her class at Howard University Law School, where she was the only woman in her class. She ended up, years later, being the first Black woman to earn a JSD from Yale Law School. Some other details: In 1950, she published a book (*States' Laws on Race and Color*) that Thurgood Marshall called the bible of the Civil Rights movement. The arguments she articulated against segregation were used by the NAACP in *Brown vs. Board of Education*. She also co-founded the National Organization for Women.

Many times throughout her life, she had been “the first” and although she was invited to become one of the first women ordained in Philadelphia, she declined. But less than a year after the ordination of the Philadelphia Eleven, and more than a year before the ordination of women would be approved, she preached a sermon at St. Philip's Church (named after one of the *Epiphany Eight*) in New York City. Here is some of what she said in that sermon on June 15, 1975:

My return to St. Philip's this morning...after an absence of many years, is somewhat like the homecoming of a prodigal. For it was here at St. Philip's that I had my first spiritual crisis...My first assignment...was to teach a Sunday school class of twelve-year-old boys, and the theme for the church year was the life of Jesus Christ.... After about two lessons with those squirming youngsters, I experienced perhaps my first defeat in performance...The realization that what I had taken for granted all of my life could not be communicated to others.... And so a crisis in teaching became a crisis of faith. ... I resigned from teaching the Sunday school class, eventually dropped out of church for several years, and began a lifelong quest for the meaning of Jesus Christ in my life.”

-Diocese of North Carolina website.

On January 8, 1977, she became the first Black woman to be ordained priest. (January of every year seems to be a time for tingling.) What stands out for me from her sermon is her realization that the lifelong quest of following Jesus is for each of us. It's not something that we inherit. It's not something that we teach. It's something that we share, like Philip saying, *Will you come with me?* God speaks in so many ways. And somehow, sometimes, our ears tingle. And somehow, sometimes, we get up and follow and become not the Epiphany Eight or the Philadelphia Eleven, but the St. Augustine's Many.

A couple of weeks ago, I mentioned that Epiphany is a season for extending blessings and receiving blessings and seeing blessings all around. So here is a short Epiphany blessing for today:

May your ears, your toes, your eyes, your whole body tingle
Come alive to the Love that is *always ready and waiting...*
The love that sees and knows and loves to the end of days.
The kind of love
that never stops saying, "Follow me."

(The Italicized language of Love comes from Kate Bowler, *A Lenten Blessing for Coming Home to Love*)