



Sermon for the Second Sunday After the Epiphany, Jan. 14, 2024

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene

Kristin Keyes

1 Samuel 3:1-10; Psalm 139: 1-5, 12-17; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1:43-51

It is the season of Epiphany – the appearance of the Magi as the first manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles. For some reason I just love the word epiphany. Aside from the appearance of the Magi, the word also means an appearance or manifestation especially of a divine being. I like the third meaning which may be more in keeping with how we might experience an epiphany today – a usually sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something; an intuitive grasp of reality through something, such as an event usually simple and striking; or an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure. Those ‘ah ha’ moments when that proverbial lightbulb goes off for us.

The season of Epiphany is short in our church year, and you'll notice that many of our scriptures during this time are filled with epiphanies. Today we read of listening and call.

Our diocesan theme this year comes directly from our Hebrew Scripture: “Speak Lord, we are listening.” This seems to be a theme for my life right now as I embark on a three-year journey of listening and discernment. Bishop Gretchen appointed me to be a member of our Commission on Ministry, a diocesan -level group that assists Bishop in the discernment, development, and formation of those seeking ministry vocations in the Order of Deacons or the Order of Priests.

This is holy work which requires deep listening for the Holy Spirit's guidance as we walk with those aspiring and discerning if they are being called into ministry.

In her December Advent letter to the diocese in the monthly News and Notes newsletter, Bishop Gretchen invited us to listen to Jesus and to ponder the question of “why Jesus?”

I took up her call and spent time on that and several similar questions. This quest to discover our own motivations for “Why Jesus,” is one of the main questions asked of the aspirants who are exploring a ministry vocation. Why do we follow Jesus? What compels us and keeps us following Jesus?

As I reviewed my notes in my prayer journal, several themes emerged. I feel God deep inside of me. Over time, I have come to know at a visceral level how deeply I am loved by God, despite my own machinations. That love, that belief in me has helped me to learn to love me too. This deep and abiding companionship has helped me develop a healthier relationship with me, which then enables me to extend more easily that love to those around me. I have learned over time that God does not desire uniformity, but diversity in all he has created. It is important that I love and embrace the diversity around me as well – from the very rocks our earth is made of, to the plants and trees, animals, and yes, the diversity of all the people around me. I don't have to necessarily like everyone, but because they are from God, I can love them too.

Jesus teaches us about radical love and asks us to love in the same way. I follow Jesus because this just makes sense to me. Love really is the foundation of the world, of all that we have, all that we are and all that we do. Love can be the impetus for change and for good.

Another reason I follow Jesus is that he invites us into community. Here I am with like-minded followers dedicated to love. We each approach it differently with our unique gifts and talents. Our underlying motivation

is love as Jesus loves. Together we create an energy that pours out love in our community and into our hurting world.

Which leads me to a key point of our gospel message today. An invitation to Come and See, and the epiphany Nathaniel experienced as his understanding of Jesus snapped into place when Jesus makes the remark about seeing him standing under a fig tree.

In today's lesson, Jesus is inviting Nathaniel into his community, just as he invited Andrew, Peter, and the other disciples. Can you imagine, Jesus must have been so compelling to evoke such immediate responses to his invitation to follow him.

It is not so different for us in our community today. We need each other as we do the work we are called to do. And one of the ways people find God is through God's people. Just as Samuel needed Eli to explain to him what was happening in the temple with God speaking out to him, we too often need others to help us understand the calls God is placing before us. It is the work we are doing with the Commission on Ministry, and the work we do here in our parish through our discipleship and formation classes.

But how do we know when we are hearing from God? We too can experience epiphanies – the appearance or manifestation of something divine or an illuminating discovery. As Bishop invited us in her Advent address, listen to Jesus in the words of our scripture. Listen to Jesus in the sounds of creation. Listen to Jesus in the voices of the poor, the hungry, the sick, and the homeless. Listen to Jesus in the sounds of our music and words of our hymns.

If you haven't seen it yet, the staff at the Diocesan office, and several of the priests in our diocese, including Fr. David, has developed a guide for grounding ourselves in biblical stories of calling, listening, and responding so that we may fully love God and love our neighbors. The meditations in this guide are designed as windows into the power of listening, holy curiosity, and courageous vulnerability, accompanying us as we follow and seek Christ together. DeDe in the office has a copy of the guide if you are interested in exploring these concepts more fully.

I want to share a lovely writing from spoken word poet Amena Brown responding to a question about listening to God:

She said, "How do you know when you are hearing from God?" I didn't know how to explain.

My words never felt so small, so useless, so incapable.

I wanted to say: Put your hand in the middle of your chest. Feel the rhythm there. I wanted to say you will find the holy text in so many places, on crinkly pages of scripture, in dusty hymnals, In the creases of a grandmother's smile.

God's ears are here for the babies. For the immigrant, for the refugee, for the depressed, for the lonely. For the dreamers, the widow, the orphan, the oppressed and the helpless. Those about to make a mess or caught in the middle of cleaning one up. Dirt don't scare God's ears. God is a gardener. God knows things can't grow without sun, rain, and soil.

I want to tell her God is always waiting. Lingering after the doors close and the phone doesn't ring, and we are finally alone. God is always saying I love you; I am here. Don't go, stay. Please.

I try to explain how God is pleading with us to trust, to love, to listen. That God's voice is melody and bass lines and whisper and thunder and grace.

Sometimes when I pray, I think of her. How the voice of God was lingering in her very question. How so many of us just like her, just like me, just like you, are still searching, still questioning, still doubting.

I know I don't have all the answers. I know I never will. That sometimes the best thing we can do is put our hands in the middle of our chest, feel the rhythm there, turn down the noise in our minds, in our lives. And whisper, God whatever you want to say, I'm here, I'm listening.

These words touched me deeply, giving me much to ponder. So today, as we hear in our scriptures, we are invited to come and see, to listen for the voice and stirrings of God. What might God be saying and how might we respond through our actions? Inevitably, when God speaks and we listen, we are changed.