



Sermon 2nd Sunday after Epiphany, January 2020

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

Good morning! God's blessings, and thanksgivings for safety and warmth and health during these cold days, and prayers for all who are not safe, are in the cold, and are sick or wrestling with ill health.

Today, we hear again those themes I talked about last week – those important spiritual experiences of Identity and Calling – of Embrace and Charge. The Holy Spirit is moving within and among us and among all people, calling us to our truest, deepest selves, as whom God made us and in whom God delights.

This message came to Jesus, fully and intensely, with God naming and embracing and delighting in him for who he was and is – God's own closely beloved. And this charge was laid on him, to go and bring God's message and gifts to all.

So, when someone names and claims and delights in us, this has a way of seeping into us, deep into our bones and blood. We begin to say, "I am known, I am loved – and I believe this that I have been named as." In Isaiah, we have these kinds of words in the mind and heart of the people of Israel who yearned for one whom God would call – and the message, in part, to the Hebrew people is that "YOU are that One. YOU, the entire chosen people with whom I have put my promise of everlasting love." And today, we can hear these words seeping through the Holy Spirit's stirring into Jesus' heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and whole being:

The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me.

He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me;

he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away.

And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." (Is. 49)

Imagine moving through the world with this in your heart and mind, at the very core of all your motivations and of who you are.

There is that identity and calling for each of us. And we find that as we listen for and give ourselves to the stirring of the Holy Spirit – and most fully as we follow Jesus, in whom and with whom we become God’s beloved children.

Now, along the way, we may experience times of futility, seeming drudgery or purposelessness or worthlessness or pointlessness. We hear this also in the words from Isaiah today:

And he said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”

But I said, “I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God.” (Is. 49)

Even in those times of the dark night of the soul, or the wandering that seems aimless or strange, we remember who we are, whose we are, and what we are called to. Steadiness, perseverance, and seeking and openness during those times will keep us going through. And that perseverance is, too, a gift from God.

But God’s embrace and charge will come back to us, and will pull us even further into what God intends for us and for the world, which is far beyond our limited scope of imagining.

- It is too small a thing
- I see you doing and being Bigger, Brighter, Greater

“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel;

I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (Is. 49)

Our imaginations, our scope, can become so small. God says, “No, there is so much more I have in store for you.”

Three events are occurring this week in our calendars, that mark our Christian life and the power of God’s calling in our lives. The first was yesterday, when the Church marked the Confession of Peter. The second is in our nation’s calendar – tomorrow – with the remembrance of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.. The third is on this coming Saturday, when the Church marks the Conversion of Paul. Each of these dates marks for us significant moments in the lives of people God called to follow Jesus, when their turning led to something bold, new, and amazing in the movement of the Holy Spirit seeking to bring redemption to this world. Peter says, “You are the Messiah, whom we have been waiting for” – and goes on to be an important anchor for the beginning of the church, even despite his ups and downs. Paul, who begins with a mutated sense of purpose that harms so many people, is shaken by his vision of Jesus Christ, and devotes himself for the rest of his life to spreading God’s word. Martin Luther

King heard God's call to set God's people free, and helped bring people who had no voice to gather together under the banner of God's promises in order to bring change in our culture.

And this week marks the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.... We pray and invite and plead with God to turn us to one another that we may become one in faith and witness to Jesus Christ and the Good News of God's unremitting love.

And, as was true with these three figures, it is true with you – you have all that you need, because it has been given and is being given by God already.

It begins with opening the door.

This week, I will be helping lead the evangelism pre-conference at the big Episcopal learning gathering in Atlanta, Rooted in Jesus. With my colleagues, I will be teaching and leading on how we SEEK.

Episcopal definition of evangelism – We seek, name, and celebrate the loving, liberating, life-giving presence of Jesus in our lives and the lives of all people, and invite them to more.

The keys to seeking God at work are openness, holy curiosity, and tuning in and paying attention. My colleagues and I will be sharing these as bits of counsel for how to seek: Follow the breadcrumbs; Where there's a door, knock gently; Accept invitations.

This is what is happening in today's Gospel reading from John 1, with the followers of John the Baptist. John's entire ministry – and ours, here, likewise – is to point beyond himself to Jesus. To point beyond ourselves to Jesus. "Not I, but Christ within me." Not us, but Christ among us. And so, John points and says, "Here! Here is Emmanuel, here is the Word made flesh, here is the Lamb of God." Two disciples, hearing this, turn and follow after Jesus – not knowing what will happen next. Two disciples come closer to Jesus – and Jesus notices, turns and asks a question: "What are you looking for?" Jesus turns to them and knocks at their door – he asks them to open their yearning to them. It's worth noting how many significant moments of encounter with Jesus – and with God throughout scripture – have Jesus (or God the Creator) asking people a question.

- What are you looking for?
- Adam, where are you? Who told you that you were naked? Cain, where is your brother?
- Why did Sarah laugh?
- Job, where were you when I formed the foundations of the earth?
- Elijah, what are you doing here?
- Whom do you seek?
- What do you want me to do for you?
- Who do you say that I am?
- Do you love me?

These questions open doors and windows into ourselves just like the opened doors and windows into the people God asked.

The two followers of John the Baptist then answer Jesus with a question that contains the answer: “Rabbi, Teacher, where are you staying?” Now, this could become one of those game moments. You know the game, where you have to have an entire conversation with questions?

But really, here these curious souls are saying in this question, “We are seeking what you have to teach us – can we follow you to where you are going to stay, so we can talk with you and be with you?” These curious souls ask. They knock at Jesus’ door.

And Jesus opens the door wide. “Come and see.” And the adventure begins.

After just a bit of time discovering Christ and finding God opening our eyes in new ways, we find ourselves filled and overflowing – with wonder, joy, and gratitude – and with an urgency growing within us that says, “It is too small a thing to keep this to myself, to ourselves. I need to bring others.”

How does Christ become Light to the nations? One by one. Person by person. Group by group. Moment by moment.

One of the curious souls, Andrew, runs to bring his brother. And his brother comes, and finds himself named and claimed – and called.

So it spreads. So the Kingdom of God moves forward. Person by person. Group by group. Moment by moment. As we share the Good News, speak of God at work, listen for God stirring in others’ lives, and invite them to open the door and encounter Jesus.

Who are you, named by God?

Whom will you seek?

Where and to whom is God calling you – to open doors, to follow the breadcrumbs, to listen for how God is calling and naming and embracing them?