



Sermon for the Second Sunday after Epiphany, Jan. 2021

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Dr. David Gortner

[1 Corinthians 9:16-23](#)

[Mark 1:29-39](#)

Good morning, beloved of God.

Today's scriptures from I Corinthians and the Gospel of Mark carry three important messages for us as followers of Jesus – and for us who are part of this parish of St. Luke's. Three statements, by Paul and by Jesus, stir us to move, to speak, to live with more courageous warmth and bolder love for people all around us and nearby. Here they are.

1. Woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel.
2. Yes, there is still hunger here. But there is also great hunger elsewhere. Let us go into the neighboring towns.
3. I will give myself to all, so that I might win some.

Friends, the world of north Idaho and in the inland Northwest is changing. The world around St. Luke's is changing. A sleepy, quiet space of retreat has become a growing set of small cities that will continue to grow and expand. More and more people are coming to this region.

Now is the time for St. Luke's to stir and to arise in new ways for the communities around us. Now. Not in the future. Now. Even yesterday. You know the saying, "When do you want it done?" "Yesterday." We may be a bit behind, but now is the time for us to stir and arise.

Coeur d'Alene is continuing to grow to triple its size from thirty years ago. Hayden also is continuing to grow.

Post Falls and Rathdrum are bursting with growth, and Post Falls is projected to move beyond Coeur d'Alene's population size within the next ten years.

I sit on the Diocesan Council for our Diocese of Spokane. We looked at census change data by town and region across the Diocese. Post Falls and Rathdrum are among the ten fastest growing towns, and among the five fastest growing towns that have no Episcopal Church.

People come to this region with hope, and with deep uncertainty. People come to this region and find not some utopia but a place with its own challenges and opportunities, problems and gifts. It can be daunting, landing in a new space. It is daunting for everyone, to create new cities where a quieter life was once the norm. Life is changing.

Woe to us if we do not proclaim the gospel. Jesus is the bringer of God's good news. Jesus lives and shows God's good news – that God loves! We have so much to share and to offer, especially in the way that we as Episcopal Christians understand the depth and power of God's amazing, life-transforming love.

Woe to us if we do not proclaim the gospel!

Yes, we are experiencing spiritual hunger and doldrums and uncertainty, and we yearn to be touched by Christ Jesus. But there is also great hunger and confusion and weariness, not far from us. Let us go into the neighboring towns. We can continue to attend to and care for one another. But the world right around us near to us is calling us. That is where Jesus is calling us. And, it is in our bones to share.

I invite you to this time of discerning and exploring what God is calling us to be for the communities around us – and specifically for the rapidly growing towns of Post Falls and Rathdrum. How will we begin to explore and learn? Who will we discover? What will we hear, and what will we say?

This opportunity before us calls us to adjust ourselves. Any time we meet new people, any time we begin to stretch and connect with others, we step beyond ourselves and set a bit of ourselves aside – because we let these new people we meet to become important to us.

I have the feeling that each person Jesus met, touched, and spoke to – each person, Jesus treated as the most important person in the world in that moment.

I think that's what Paul is getting at, when he talks about giving himself to all people as a slave. When he met others as a witness to the good news of God's grace and love, he did not claim or assume any rights over them. He sought to understand, so that he could know how to give himself in a familiar and recognizable way to each group he met. Whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, lawless or law-abiding, weak or strong, Paul sought to meet each person and group understanding them for who they were and learning to speak their language and know their concerns and passions. In today's terms, whether longtime Idahoan or newcomer (even from California), Black or Latino or Native American or Asian or White, Republican or Democrat, poor or rich, old or young, unhealthy or healthy – Paul would do as Jesus would. And we will do this, too.

It takes a change in us to meet people where they are, to listen deeply and seek to understand, and to begin and nurture new relationships. During Lent, we will have opportunities to practice this with each other through bible, book, prayer, and intentional conversation groups. There is a great set of questions for practicing conversation and learning to discover one another deeply, put forward by The Episcopal Church in a resource called, "From Many, One." The series calls us to seek new connection, to open up space, to listen, and to share across the differences that divide us. Four questions open the space for listening and sharing: "What do you love?" "What have you lost?" "Where does it hurt?" "What do you dream?" Imagine if we made space for these kinds of honest, deep questions with each other – and with the people we know and do not know all around us.

You will hear me speak about these things more in the days ahead. For now, let the Lord stir you. Each of us has opportunities in our daily lives to build and strengthen relationships, to reach out to

neighbors and strangers with care and a word of God's grace, to listen and share in ways that open the heart, to speak of God's love in ways that meet another's life. It is all within us. Each of us has ways of reaching and stretching beyond ourselves, wherever we are and in whatever time of life we are. And, thanks be to God, each of us knows already what it means to give ourselves away to others. Even during this time of pandemic precautions, we can reach out and extend ourselves. And we can begin to prepare ourselves for how we as a church will do this more vigorously and intentionally when the pandemic subsides.

Over this coming year, we will be exploring intently how to build relationships and launch some extensions of St. Luke's in the Post Falls area, and of course in places throughout Coeur d'Alene. We can begin this by fostering neighborhood groups in each place where St. Luke's folks live and work, first bringing together people from St. Luke's who are in the same neighborhood.

Jesus did not stay in one place. Jesus invited his disciples to join him on a continuing journey of extending God's saving love – "Let us go to the neighboring towns." This is our call as a church. Join Christ Jesus, on the road. Discover how God is already at work in the hearts and minds and lives of people all around us – and dare to name the God of Life who is already with them and calling them to new life. This is a great adventure!