

Calling

Epiphany 3 2023, St. Andrew's Kelowna
Isaiah 9:1-4; Ps 27:1, 5-13; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23

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In the Name of God who knew us before we were born, calls us by name and calls us to life. Amen.

Think of time in your life when you were aware of the presence of God with you, of the presence of Jesus calling you onward.....

Where were you?

What was the core feeling or knowing in that Presence ?

Our Gospel reading this morning invites us into this really deep truth of who God is and how God calls. We are gifted with another story of our Patron Saint Andrew today- that's two Sunday's in the row! - and it's right in the middle of fishing, his daily grind, of what has to be done in the day that God calls him into God's mission. Normally, a student would pursue the teacher they wanted to follow, but here Jesus is the one to travel to Galilee, to a Gentile region, and he is the one to go to them and to call them! A complete reversal and Matthew links Jesus proclamation of the Kingdom and his calling of the disciples with the prophecies of Isaiah so we will put this in that gorgeous context of that great light, of God's liberation, of dawn breaking on those who sat in the darkness of death. God goes out to them and meets them right in the middle of the story they are already living, weaving them into God's own story and life and liberation. They are fishermen whom Jesus will form into those who fish for people. Jesus will make them into people who live and breathe God's own life and story and the Spirit within them, bearing fruits in them, will draw others into this reality. And as we know from the gospels, making and forming the disciples was no small, and a fairly frustrating, undertaking! Matthew's gospel will make this same point at its end so we can't miss it, Jesus says, "But after I have been raised from the dead, I will go ahead of you to Galilee and meet you there" (26:32). I will meet you there again, call you there still, after everything falls apart and you start living again, I will be there ahead of you in Galilee and keep calling you. Jesus meets us and calls us into the incredible work of Kingdom-living exactly where we are and exactly as we are. And it is Jesus who then makes, forms, loves, teaches and grows us into Kingdom people. It is Jesus, risen and alive, who is making, remaking, forgiving, healing, bringing light to the darkness, making holy what has been desecrated; Jesus is renewing the world through the eternal gift of his life. And so, as the poet Malcolm Guite notes, when we think about being called as Christians we think about "calling not as task but as gift of being"¹. Calling not as a task but as a gift of being. Or as we sang in our opening hymn this morning, "Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?"

And that's what I'd love us to dwell in today, that being called by Jesus is not first about being called to do something particular or peculiar for God, but of gift: Jesus gifts us with His life which gifts us with new life and we in turn sent to be gifts to the world. It's a beautiful mutual gifting; it's an economy of gift we might say. In John's Gospel, he'll describe our calling as "having the light of life" and then as: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, fruit that

¹ Online Lecture: *Poetry, Imagination and the Call to Ministry*. Duke Initiatives in Theology and the Arts.

will last” (8:12, 15:16). God has chosen you, each one of you. God delights in you, in each one of you, deeply. And God calls you onward today and calls us as a communion of people who share God’s life and God’s story, onward to be a gift to all of creation.

And so we are so thrilled to formally welcome Lee, Merano, Brea, Julie and Stuart, Jane & Wanda. You are already gifts to us and we are excited to get to know you, to learn your story and learn together how God is weaving us into more wholeness, more newness and more kingdom-living because you are here. Through Covid God called us as a parish and gifted us with a new way of being: new mission priorities, a new structure, new ministries. We were even gifted with land and farmers and water and manure and fencing and seeds and we started a small farm called “The Gift” Farm-Garden to remind us of this core reality of our shared calling as Christians. And this story, this gift, just keeps on being written and given, never as we expect, or even as we might choose, but as we need. We know this literally from the farm: some years things we plant grow and some years they don’t, sometimes things we didn’t plant grow and there will always, always be weeds to pull! Jesus will keep meeting us and offering the light of life to our darkness both personally and in community. As we look to the year ahead I am reminded of what St. Ignatius said in his writings on discernment: Stay where the fruit is. Those fruits of the spirit, of God a live in you, choose to be where the immense goodness, mercy and grace of God is alive in you.

So as we gather for coffee in the hall after the service, ask one another to share the story you thought of at the beginning of the sermon. Ask someone you don’t know well and listen to a story of God in their lives. Whatever it is they might choose to share and then share what you would like to share. Our parish icon of Jesus calling Andrew at the lakeshore is set up in the hall if you need a conversation starter. And if, for whatever reason, you are at a point where you don’t feel like you don’t have a story to tell, I’d love to leave you with this story.

Thomas Clarkson was one of the key players in the campaign to abolish slavery in England. It took 20 years to do it and another 26 to abolish it in the Commonwealth and so as you can imagine he came to a point of deep exhaustion and despair - of immense burnout we’d call it today- and was sent away to a cottage in the English countryside to recover. There he met the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge and they began to write to one another letters, to share their stories. We still have some of those letters and in one of them Clarkson writes “ I’m loosing my....I have no more idea of the Divine”.... to which Coleridge responds (paraphrased here): “Don’t worry whether you have any idea of the Divine but never forget that you are a Divine Idea, that all things were made through the Word, we are eternally thought of and loved in the mind of Christ and now, by His word, by His voice, by His vocation, he speaks us into beingso let him finish what he has to say to the world in you....”.²

God is weaving us together, all of our stories, to continue St. Andrew’s story, the Kingdom story in this place. Weaving us together maybe even a bit like a fishermen’s net here on Lakeshore Road. Amen.

² Ibid.