

Squamish United Church
Rev. Karen Millard
Epiphany II

January 14, 2018

Scripture Readings

I Samuel 3:1-10

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

John 1: 43-51

Epiphany Life

Several years ago as a congregation we did a series called "Come and See" We talked about what it means to become a disciple. We talked about what Jesus expects from us before we are welcomed by him. In this season of Epiphany we are reminded that all that is required is our willingness to "Come and See." The wise ones followed the star, met with Jesus and were transformed in such a way their the whole of their lives were altered. The disciples met Jesus on the journey of their lives and discovered such a transforming presence that they couldn't help but share him with others. "Come and See" they said.

In the gospel of John discipleship starts with you. The Epiphany Karoline Lewis has to share with us is that she finds "it more than interesting that before Jesus says, "follow me" it is one of those two disciples who followed Jesus first, who finds "another sheep not of this fold" first (10:16). Because this is what following Jesus will look like -- it will mean taking John 3:16 seriously. (*believing that Jesus has come for all the world*) It will mean taking the witness of the woman at the well seriously. It will mean finding those who have been cast out of communities for their courage to confess their faith in Jesus (John 9:34). It will mean believing that the Spirit is indeed your very breath as Jesus sends you out into the world (John 20:21-22). It will mean being thrown out yourself (16:2), rejected for insisting that God's love for the world and everyone in it -- everyone -- is actually true.

And, it means that your witness -- your experience of abiding with Jesus (1:39), about what that relationship is like, about what it has done for you and how it has changed you -- might be believed by someone else." I don't mean the kind of witness that shoves religion down another persons throat I mean the kind of witness that bears love, offers grace, welcomes and encourages others, even those who might be different than us.

I do wonder sometimes if we really believe that what we say and do makes a difference. If we really believe that our witness really matters. I know it does. As far as Squamish United Church goes for example in the last months I have received calls from social workers saying they are impressed with how we are connecting community and they are sending people my way. I have done three weddings in the last month just because people felt safe to come our way predicting I would not judge their situation the way others pastors or religious organizations might. We are connecting more and more with programs and resources with Sea to Sky community services and we are starting fill up with bookings. It is as we bare witness, as we show love and get the word out that we care that people feel safe to check out 'church' or religion again. Not because we

want new members but because we know people need a place to belong, to feel and discover love and welcome, care and grace.

Quinn G. Caldwell wrote in his reflection this week “At some point, Disciples turn into Apostles. Jesus evolves the Disciples into Apostles, readying them to be sent out with a message... I for one am glad they let it happen; if they had chosen not to change, Christianity would have died when they did.

(Caldwell asks) What stage of Christian evolution are you in? Do you go to church, try to live a good life, and leave it at that? Or do you talk with other people about it as well?

For the sake of everyone else in the break room who doesn't know how sweet faith can be, isn't it time to stand up to that loud atheist/fundamentalist/whatever at work?

Or do what one member of my church does: she periodically sets her Facebook status to something like, "Can't wait for church tomorrow! Anybody want to go with and then get brunch after?" You'd be surprised how many take her up on it. Or you could just be sure your FB profile lists your religion and a link to your church. Or you could write a letter to the editor—explicitly as a Christian—on an issue of the day. Or...well, you get the point: be creative.

Do you think Christianity—or your flavour of it—matters enough to be kept alive, or are you happy to let it die with you? If the latter, then enjoy your discipleship. If the former, it's time to evolve.

Our texts this week are more than fitting for the season of Epiphany. This week, John asks us to participate in God's epiphanies in a different way; to trust that pointing out Jesus in our midst, saying “behold” -- the very definition of Epiphany -- will indeed make John 3:16 come true. This week we are reminded that God called upon a child to share the news and change the world (a child living in the temple - not the priest was the one God spoke to and gave a mission to).

I agree with Lewis when she writes “I suspect we do not always believe that God could leave it up to us to fulfill God's own promises. We tend to leave the finding to God, ... We only go so far in finding the spurned and scorned, because we might ourselves have to change. And we question whether or not our witness can be heard, or if we believe it ourselves.

Hearing, seeing, following, abiding, and finding is an epiphany way of life... We watch for the presence of Jesus in our midst, looking in places we may have pre-determined as unworthy of the divine. We follow Jesus, that is first simply abiding in a relationship that reveals to us what real relationship should be.”¹

Perhaps our call right now today is to stop like Samuel and really listen and when we listen we might say “Speak Lord for your servant heareth.” Or “Okay God, I'm listening” But before you do that you might ponder for a moment What are you listening for? If you are not sure you might stop and ask yourself “Who am I silencing? Who am I not hearing? What am I not hearing? How is God speaking to me? To whom am I really listening? Take a moment to stop and look at this statement and these questions.

Hearing, seeing, following, abiding, and finding are the epiphany way of life.

¹ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5040>

It might not always be easy to share you are a church goer. We find it easier these days to say - we don't want to impose anything. The brand of Christianity we might not lean towards has given us every reason to say that. However if our lives are really impacted by our faith than why wouldn't we want others to experience it. "Philip tells Nathaniel that he believes he has found the one Moses and all the prophets foretold in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and Nathaniel isn't simply skeptical, but downright insulting. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" he asks sarcastically, his tone likely providing an answer to his rhetorical question.

And in response to Nathaniel's scorn, Philip does an amazing thing. A grace-filled thing. A thing Jesus himself had done a little earlier. Philip invites Nathaniel to "come and see." All of which brings us back to the heart of Christian evangelism: it is nothing more or less than inviting people to come and see Jesus, God's gracious Word made flesh, for themselves. To come and see those who are inspired by Jesus enough to try to follow him. To come and see how God continues to work in the world and in our lives.

That's it. Nothing fancy, nothing heroic, and certainly nothing threatening. Just a simple invitation.

Most of us aren't very practiced in making that kind of invitation. We worry it will seem inappropriate or even aggressive. But I'm guessing that if you've ever been invited by someone to share something they enjoy, love, and value, it hasn't felt that way at all. Philip invites Nathaniel. He doesn't cajole or coerce or intimidate. He just invites. And we can do the same. Perhaps those we invite will like what they find. And perhaps they won't. Perhaps skeptics like Nathaniel will find something they didn't expect. Or perhaps they'll want to keep searching. None of that matters all that much, or at least isn't up to us. All we're called to do is invite — Come and see! — God will do the rest.”²

Except “when it comes to Jesus, it doesn't stop with come and see, but always moves to the deeper invitation to come and be. Be what God has called you. Be the person the world needs. Be all you can be. Be the beloved child of God who invites others to a similarly transformative experience of relationship with Christ.

David Lose writes “The congregation I presently serve has had the same mission statement for generations, summarized in the phrase “Believing, belonging, becoming.” I love that motto. From time to time, I wonder whether “belonging” should come first, as while in years past those looking for a church were most interested in what a congregation believed (denominational affiliation), in recent years folks seem most to want a community that simply accepts them as they are and invites them to belong. Regardless of where I land on that question (and I'm not sure it matters all that much!), I've never doubted that “becoming” should culminate and complete our mission statement, because that is the one stretches across our whole lives and very much characterizes what it means to be a Christian. One is never left alone, that is, by grace, untouched or unmoved, but one is rather always pulled to some more, something greater, something closer to God's dreams for us.

In one of my favourite “Luther quotations,” the Reformer said

² <http://www.davidlose.net>

This life therefore is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness; not health, but healing; not being, but becoming; not rest, but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it. The process is not yet finished, but it is going on. This is not the end, but it is the road. All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified. (1)

Among other things, tucked into this observation is the good news that God is not done with us! That, indeed, God will never be done, never give up, keep showing us with grace and inviting us to become more even as God loves us just as we are.”³

Perhaps my friends our task for this new year is to keep offering the gracious invitation of Jesus and his disciples “come and see” Perhaps it will result in Nathaniel’s rather stunning reversal and confession. Perhaps it will empower people to witness to their friends and neighbours what they have experienced, as it does with the woman at the well. Or perhaps it will give people the courage to face the adversity in their lives, as it does the man who receives his sight. We don’t know. But we do know that Jesus keeps extending that invitation to us and to all the world. The invitation to become the persons God has called us to be and the world needs. Even when we fall short. Even when we have a hard time believing. Even when we don’t feel worthy of God’s attention or care? Even when we have a hard time getting ourselves to church... or preparing this week’s sermon. Yet Jesus is still there, always inviting and loving and forgiving and redeeming...and all out of the “grace upon grace” (Jn. 1:16) that he embodies, incarnates, and offers.

Hearing, seeing, following, abiding, and finding are the epiphany way of life.
Let’s live out this Epiphany life together.

³ <http://www.davidlose.net/2018/01/epiphany-2-b-gracious-invitation/>