



SAINT LUKE'S

"THE CALL"

2ND AFTER EPIPHANY
YEAR A

ISAIAH 49:1-7

PSALM 40

1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-9

JOHN 1:29-42

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY

JANUARY 15, 2017

The theme of God's call runs through today's readings: Isaiah; Paul; and then Jesus' call to the first disciples Andrew and Simon. Did you notice that according to John's gospel, Andrew and Simon were originally John the Baptist's disciples? Andrew and Simon - and John the Baptist himself - all realize that God is now calling them to follow Jesus.

Do you know you are called? Do you believe that? What does it mean for us to be called by Jesus today? In essence, it means that we are God's person. If you know the TV series "Grey's Anatomy", you know that deep friendship runs through that story of surgeons in training. The surgeons sometimes refer to their closest friend as "my person". Meaning, this is the person I can count on. Who will be there for me no matter what. "She's my person". We are called to be God's person. We are called to speak up for God. We have a bigger reference point and compass than ourselves and our interests alone. We ground our understanding of justice and goodness in God's mandate and God's strength - specifically, in Jesus' life and teaching. The relationship we have with God starts to govern our relationships with our neighbors too. We come to see our responsibilities to others differently because we are God's person. Our life becomes an expression of our love of God. For most of us, this transformation takes more than our earthly lifetime and so we are given eternity to continue to grow towards God. And it all starts with that primary call from God to be God's person in an intimate, life-changing, always new relationship.

It matters very much that we understand that we are God's people. Imagine a world where no-one speaks up for God. Where no-one speaks

against injustice and cruelty and violence and bullying. This is Martin Luther King weekend and we are on the brink of a new presidency that holds potential for profound disintegration and division in our country. There is understandably a lot of fear in our nation. In 1956 it was the early days of the Montgomery bus boycott. King received death threats and threats of harm to his family. King prayed about what to do and he speaks of hearing “the quiet assurance of an inner voice”, and “heard the voice of Jesus saying still to fight on”. Dr. King mixed faith and politics all the time. The gospel is not political but it does have serious political implications. Implications for sharing of resources; for how we treat each other and all of God’s creation. What it means to be called by Jesus is that it is *Jesus’* voice we hear saying fight on. The courage and the vision and the hope and strength come from Jesus. Those of us who come after say Thank God for King’s calling and his perseverance: for being God’s person. I tremble to think what might have happened if King had not fought on. Or – what might *not* have happened if King had given up.

You may have noticed that the rainbow PRIDE flag is flying outside. I decided we need to fly the flag in these days and not only for LGBT folks. My understanding is that the PRIDE flag is shorthand for inclusion and safe harbor. The flag says: we respect the dignity of *every* human being and *all* are equally welcome here. If one person is diminished, we are all diminished. No one stands alone in their fears - LGBT, minorities, immigrants, women, people with special needs, people of different faiths and races. We will be there for you. And our rainbow flag celebrates difference as a strength. This belief is rooted in the diversity of God’s creation – it is all good, God says. Difference is

not to be feared but embraced.

In his farewell address this week, President Obama warned against the dangers of living in bunkers and Obama mentioned houses of worship as one place that can be a bunker containing only those who think just like us. I hope that we are a beacon not a bunker. I hope that we embrace difference. I know we have Democrats here at St. Luke's, and some independents; and I hope we are diverse enough that we also have some Republicans among us at St. Luke's. Because honoring and really embracing difference in church gives us practice for the world. Because there is one Lord, one Faith and one Baptism, we can all be part of the same community. When Christ unites, nothing can ultimately divide. Difference makes us stronger, not weaker. Now we know that the gospel can be deployed for good or for evil – it is timeless and open to manipulation. We cannot prevent the perversion of the gospel in our country or in certain forms of religion. What we *can* do is say what we are *for*. Saying what we are against is not enough. The rainbow flag is the battle standard sign of our fight for inclusion, racial and socio-economic equal opportunity and justice for all. It's our turn. Go march and rally this week if you can – I know many parishioners are marching in DC or closer to home. Jesus calls us now as he called King to fight on in the cause of freedom and justice for all in a time when our freedoms cannot be taken for granted.

The only failure for God's people is quitting. Anything other than quitting is par for the course because we will sometimes fail, we will sometimes lose heart. Like Isaiah we will sometimes feel: *I have labored*

in vain! I have spent my strength for nothing! And we will sometimes stumble, as disciples have always done. But God's people persevere in season and out of season. We will be a beacon. We will fight on tirelessly and we will never give up. We will not cease speaking and striving for God's vision of justice and freedom until every person is as equally valued in this land as they are equally valued by God.

AMEN

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