



SAINT LUKE'S

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY
YEAR A

ISAIAH 9:1-4
1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-18
MATTHEW 4:12-23
PSALM 27:1, 5-13

A SERMON BY THE REV. EMILY PHILLIPS LLOYD

JANUARY 22, 2017

It has been a historical week. This week we, as a nation, saw the final stage of the transition of the presidency with the inauguration of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States.

No one can deny that has been a time of terrible division within the nation. I was reading an article this week about groups of people being tricked into following unqualified celebrities and moving backwards instead of forwards and it turned out I was not reading the news from this week but actually first Corinthians. To my mind, in the height of her division, America isn't really all that different than the Corinthian church in today's Epistle reading.

There are moments when our revised common lectionary can be brutally poignant. I have been overwhelmed this week by our shared humanity. The inauguration is on everyone's mind. Everywhere I go, it is all America can talk about. From heated conversation on Facebook to chanting on the Subway, I am sure many of you join me in feeling a little like a ping pong ball. I bounce back and forth between mourning and fear for our country and intense pride for my brothers and sisters standing up for what they believe in. The unbelievable reality of this week in national news juxtaposed with the transcendent joy of Frank and Doug's wedding here in this sanctuary yesterday.

As we enter into a new unknowable future, I take comfort in the company of our spiritual ancestors who have also lived in difficult times.

In his first letter to the people of Corinth, St. Paul is tackling head on some of the infighting that is going on in this new community of Christians. I love this passage because it gives us a snapshot into the humanity of one of our great church fathers. We watch as the struggling people of Corinth increasingly irritate the saint. At one point in our reading, an exasperated Paul even blurts out... I can't remember who I baptized but I am glad I did not baptize more of you! I am preacher anyway... not a Baptist!

So what is all of this bickering about? It seems the people of Corinth in the early church are fairly gullible and are often led astray by false prophets. People are people. I often think of this passage anytime someone tells me that they wish we could just be like the early church. The question that keeps coming up in the church in Corinth is whom do we follow? Who do we belong to?

The people are getting confused and instead of following Christ, they are following whoever baptized them. So we have brand new Corinthian Christians running around claiming to belong to Apollo or Cephas or Paul instead of Christ. Apparently, there is a need for some continuing Christian education in Corinth. By the way, the question is timeless and important, who do we belong to?

Obviously, we don't belong to Apollo, Cephas or Paul. But friends, we don't belong to Donald Trump or even Barack Obama either. We belong to each other and to God. We belong to Christ.

All of our readings this week point to following no one but God. In Isaiah, we hear the words of hope from the prophet. “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined.” Christ is the light that has come into the world and the darkness did not overcome it.

But what does it mean to follow Christ and to belong to him? And what does that mean today of all days, Sunday, January 22, 2017. It means the same thing it has always meant. It means devoting ourselves to walking in Christ footsteps and following his example. It means living into our own call.

And how do we do that? We can start by looking at how Jesus lived into his own call. Jesus ministry is set into motion by the arrest of John the Baptist. Jesus is called into action by something terrible. Jesus responds with urgency, gathers together helpers and goes to the local synagogue where he proclaims the famous words from Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.”

How can the events going on in the political life of this country actually call us to be better Christians? Now, more than ever, we need good news. We need to be the good news. Our gospel reading reminds us that following Jesus means giving up the old way of life and immediately following him. Like Simon Peter and Andrew, we are called to abandon our old comfortable way of living and set out on a new radical path

following Jesus. We are called to fish for people.

I have always been uncomfortable with the metaphor of fishing. It doesn't tend to end well for the fish. But fishing for people isn't about bait and hooks or any form of trickery, it's about being present to those who are in need as your authentic self. It is the simple act of putting someone else first. Sharing a hug, smile or cup of coffee.

It is being a companion on this amazing journey of life as a family member, friend, colleague or even as a complete stranger. It is seeing God in all people no exceptions... It's inviting someone to pray with you. It's accepting the prayers of those offer them. It is following the example of Jesus and standing face to face with those who curse, persecute and revile you and engaging them in non-violent acts of love.

In this week, when so many of us feel angry and powerless, Christ reminds us that there is so much we can do if we remember just who it is that we serve and to whom to belong. We don't belong to any power of this world. We belong to Christ.

Amen

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