

TELLING IT LIKE IT IS

2 Epiphany – B January 14, 2018

John 1:43-51

This is our first worship of the new year, and I was debating keeping last week's *Day of Epiphany* theme (transferring the Saturday feast to Sunday), as my desire to close out the Christmas season and celebrate the visit of the Magi was interrupted by the little blizzard we had that kept us apart last Sunday. I decided to move forward, because exactly one month from today, Lent begins; so it seems better to look at some of the ways God is being made known or manifested.

Revelation of The Divine is something that is a theme that threads our readings together today. First, we hear about God calling Samuel, a young boy serving in The Temple who finally realizes this call isn't from Eli, but from God. "Speak, [Lord,] for your servant is listening."

The very first line of the psalm tells us: "Lord, you have searched me out; O Lord, you have known me." And that sounds almost verbatim like that which must be going through Nathaniel's mind when he has his first encounter with Jesus.

In his letter to the church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul reminds the people that they don't live in a vacuum: that everything is relational; and those who are baptized into Jesus belong to him and honor him with their minds and bodies. Our words and our deeds count. They say everything about us. In the aftermath of this week's mudslides and every other terrible thing that has happened, people have put their lives on the line to serve as rescuers, first responders, and comforters. They are God's hands and feet in the world. Wherever there is a voice of compassion, or an action that seeks to bind up and bind together, it is a moment of epiphany—a revelation of God.

In the gospel, as Jesus is calling together his disciples, we (and they) come to realize that the One we call God-with-us is the one who pursues us—who knows us from the very beginning. When we understand the depth of God's love and acceptance, we cannot help but invite others to "Come and see." So Jesus calls Philip and Philip calls Nathaniel. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" "Come and see!" How about Dare County? Come and see!

In summary, our texts focus on God's call as it came to those long ago, and as it still comes to us. In our Baptism we are made members of the body and welcomed into the community. Because we are community, our call is always about caring for one another. And that *one another* includes every *other*: those across the globe, even those whom we haven't met.

Given some things said this week, it's important to remember that wherever you look, you will find yourself face-to-face with a child of God. Marginalizing people, or even the places from which they come, is not relational. Yet, we bear witness to a relational God—One who believes we are all here for each other. People who live in the image of God, people who are glimpses (little epiphanies) of God's love do not marginalize; they do not discriminate, they do not exploit, and they do not defame. Our call sets us apart to be voices of good news, and that means we stand in opposition to that which is contrary to God's good news.

This weekend, and specifically tomorrow, we commemorate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who felt God's call to make a difference. Like others who felt God's call, King realized that the call to

faithfulness is not one of taking the easy road; but rather, one of doing the work to make God's love real, to make epiphany moments (visions of God) happen.

King's father, also a Baptist minister, took the name of the great reformer himself and bestowed it upon his son as well, because he believed that God's call means changing our preconceptions of God and challenging the world's misconceptions of God. As Martin Luther shared a vision of the gospel in the 1500s, Dr. King envisioned God's love as true justice for all in the 1900s, and we follow nearly 50 years later, because the work of mutual recognition and reconciliation still falls short. While much progress toward justice has been made, we still see daily that there is work to be done.

The toughest part of this call of God is not about simply existing as a congregation (although we've faced some challenges in the past), but making the gospel so much a part of who we are that, beyond these doors, we butt heads with the powers that be and the things that are. Years ago the expression was "telling it like it is." Today we "speak truth to power" or "call *them* out." Like every voice that has sought to be faithful to God's call, we find that it's hard work to proclaim God's vision in the midst of a world that profanes and defames what God has called "good." But remember, God called each one of us "good," even with our shortcomings and in spite of our mistakes, because God believes we are up to the job of making the vision real.

God has richly blessed us and brought us together to be church for a purpose. We come together in community to remind ourselves that as we take our faith to heart, as we pray with our hands and our feet, our hearts and our minds, we will know that God is with us to give us the wisdom, the voice, and the ability to be church and to do the work of Good News. Amen.

[We will remember that purpose through the words of a portion of Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech, which we will read responsively as our post-communion "sending" this morning. His dream remains our vision and God's desire for the world. In thanksgiving to God and in celebration of the life of one of God's servants, we keep the vision alive.]