

Second Sunday after Epiphany  
Year A - 15/1/2017

Isaiah 49:1-7  
Psalm 40:1-14  
1 Corinthians 1:1-9  
John 1:29-42

**In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...**

For the longest time, I believed the lie  
That I'm not a strong enough believer  
To be the friend that can take your hand  
And lead you straight to Jesus  
I'm waiting on the preachers, the singers, and the teachers  
To string the perfect words together...

So begin the lyrics to a song by the American Christian Band, *Casting Crowns*. In the song the lyricist contemplates the reality that I think is at the heart of why so many churches like ours are in decline - and that is we have lost or misunderstood the meaning of the word "evangelism". Whatever the reason (and there may be many), I think that there is a great temptation for us as Christians to somehow believe that evangelism (telling of the good news of Jesus) is something that is done by someone else.

*Who* that might be, and *how* that might be *done*, I suspect we are less clear about - but it's definitely someone else's job!!

But that is not what our readings today tell us. Indeed each of our readings today have something to say about the two great aspects of evangelism - firstly, that the initiative in calling forth God's servants lies with God - but secondly, the readings remind us of the communal, and dare I say even *public* character of faith.

Isaiah proclaims that God issued his calling "before I was born," and "while I was in my mother's womb." The Servant, it seems, has no right of refusal, no initiative of his own to express. St. Paul identifies both himself and the Corinthians as people who are "called" to be God's people. And John the Baptist is identified as one who has been sent for a specific task.

It seems clear that from the greatest figures in the history of Israel and the life of the church to the most anonymous woman and man, God's servants have their role as a result of God's calling on their lives. That is, after all, why any of us are here.

And although the *callings* of God's servants vary as greatly as the contexts in which they find themselves, today we are reminded that the calling is never to a merely private expression of faith.

Isaiah anticipates not simply the restoration of Israel, but the salvation of the "end of the earth"—a limitless arena. Even in the opening lines of his letter to the Corinthians, Paul makes clear that it is not enough for believers to hold a private faith; their public fellowship with one another must reflect the unity of their faith. And John the Baptist proclaims the revelation he has received about Jesus, not in order to enlarge himself as recipient, but to bear witness to God's Son.

So if our calling, initiated by God, is to lives of faith, and we are called to share that faith - how might we go about it...

I suspect that often we make it all too complicated, at least in our minds. Whereas probably the reverse is true - it is the simple things which make it possible to share our faith. Take the Gospel of today, for example. Did you notice how it differed from last week's account of Jesus' Baptism?

Matthew records Jesus coming to John the Baptism to be baptized, describes the descent of the dove, and tells the message of the heavenly voice. But John's Gospel is characteristically different. Here we get a second-hand account from the testimony of John the Baptist. But, quite interestingly, he doesn't actually baptize Jesus in this gospel; instead he only shares what he sees.

And that may be the larger point of this story from the Fourth Gospel -- that when it comes to our relationship with Jesus, our primary job is to *see* and *share*. Not threaten, not coerce, not intimidate, not beg or plead, but simply to see and share.

John the Baptist does that here. He sees the dove descend upon Jesus and tells others what he sees. That's it. Andrew later does the same. He tells his brother what he and John's other disciples saw -- the person they believe is the Messiah -- and invites Peter to come along and see for himself.

Could it be that simple? At its heart, evangelism is noticing what God is doing in our lives, sharing that with others, and inviting them to come and see for themselves. And this is not only what John the Baptist does, and it's not only what Andrew does. It's also what Jesus does. When Jesus notices some of John's disciples following him, he asks them what they are looking for. They, in turn, ask where he is staying. He doesn't give an answer. He doesn't question further. All he does in response is make an invitation: "Come and see."

Notice. Share. Invite. These are the three elements of evangelism; the sharing the good news of what God has done and is still doing through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for us and all the world.

So what does it mean to notice. Sometimes I think this is a pretty challenging step, but I am encouraged by one of the pearls of wisdom ascribed to the former Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey, who said that "Christianity is all about noticing where God is already at work and joining in." This first step, of noticing where God is at work, seeing the signs, is one which we can all do, I am sure. They might be glimpses only, little signs, but they are there, I have no doubt.

So, to sharing. Most of us are nervous about sharing our faith, simply because we've never done it. That means practice is probably the only solution to this problem. You might find that one safe way to begin this practice is to ask someone from this congregation, after the service, why they come here. Not only is it a good way to get to know each other a bit better, but it gives you an opportunity to think about why it is this is an important place for you, and what you would want others to know about it. It's intended to not be a big deal, and yet it sometimes is simply because we're not used to doing this.

If you can share, then I believe you can also invite. Now this may at first seem the hardest of all. It can feel so intrusive, and of course it puts demands on us to follow through. And yet ... think about it: we invite people to things all the time. To join a book club or play tennis, to go to an event or to come over for dinner, to attend a sporting event or to go shopping.

We're actually quite good about inviting folks to come to things ... just not to church. And, of course, we invite people to those things we really like, those things we've enjoyed and think others would, too. We need to ask ourselves first, what elements of our church life do we most value? That is, we're not just going because we *have to* but because we enjoy it. (If we can't identify any, then that's another problem altogether!) Then, our task is simply to think about who might also enjoy this event or activity and invite them. Framed this way, perhaps it is not as hard as it seems.

John the Baptist shares the wonder of what he saw, and Jesus gains his first disciples, people who will carry his message to the ends of the earth. Jesus invites them to come and see, and they leave their homes and families to embark upon God's great adventure. Andrew tells his brother he really ought to meet Jesus, and the rock upon whom Jesus will build his church falls into faith.

From the beginning of creation until now, God delights in taking little things -- things the world decides are nothing -- and doing something wonderful through them. So also with our initial attempts to share faith, our tentative ventures into telling others what we've seen and felt. They may feel like very small efforts, yet the God who brought light from darkness and raises the dead to life wants to -- and will! -- do marvelous things through them.

In the name of God. Amen.