

The Third Sunday after the Epiphany – January 26, 2020 – The Rev. Canon Joan Anthony
Isaiah 9:1-4, Psalm 27:1, 5-13, 1 Corinthians 1:10-18, Matthew 4:12-23

“Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” With these words of proclamation, Jesus began his ministry in Palestine. With these words Jesus called together a community of disciples, not just the twelve, but a community of people who heard his words and understood them as an invitation to live in a new and different way. The kingdom to which people were being summoned was not a political entity, it was not a physical place with boundaries and borders. The kingdom Jesus was proclaiming was a way of life. It is a call, and invitation that has been heard in every century and continues to be heard today. It is an invitation that is given to each one of us here in this community of disciples. Repent, literally turn around and move in another direction. Last week, the gospel writer John told of two who saw Jesus and curious, they asked a question. In answer, they were invited by Jesus with the simple words “Come and see.” It was thus that Andrew became a disciple and brought his brother Peter as well. Come and see this kingdom way of living. Becoming a disciple, a follower of Jesus, always begins with a question and an invitation. Come and see, not you will notice “wait” and see. The invitation, the call of God is answered by movement, it is answered by repentance, a change in direction, the call of God is one of decisive action. Jesus calls his disciples, through the centuries to the kingdom which has come near. Quite literally, a kingdom way of living that is at hand, at the tips of ones fingers, waiting to be embraced. Come and see, enter the kingdom way without hesitation, without caution but with joy. How different the lives of Andrew and Peter would have been had they decided on the safe strategy, one of wait and see. And we are not so different from Andrew and Peter.

Matthew tells the story of the call of these first disciples a bit differently. All four were fishermen, earning their livelihood on the Sea of Galilee. Walking along the shore, Jesus calls Peter and Andrew with the simple words, “Follow me.” And, Matthew says, Peter and Andrew responded immediately, leaving their nets, their way of life behind. Going a bit further on, Jesus saw James and John, who were mending their nets, preparing for another day like all the ones before. Jesus called them and they too, immediately left the boat, to follow, to repent, to change the entire direction of their lives. What would it take to make us take such seemingly impulsive action. What would it take to throw caution on the wind and immediately answer God’s voice in our lives?

Peter and Andrew, James and John, were the first of the millions of people over thousands of years who have heard the invitation of God, the first who have been called out of the place where they were, into a new way of living, kingdom living. They were the first, but not the last. Come and see, Follow me, the invitation is always open. Repent, change direction, for the kingdom is at hand for each one of us. How different the lives of the these four fishermen would have been had they chosen to ignore the call, chosen differently, stayed fishing, and waited. Instead they took the first step, not knowing where the second step might lead. Instead, they responded with their hearts, leaving their nets, stepping out of the boat, choosing the way of kingdom living.

And we today are called to do the same. We are called to hear God’s voice inviting us to come and see what might be possible in ministry for St. Augustine. We are called to change direction, keeping what is of value and discover what is possible. We are called to follow where God is

leading in the adventure of being community together. Quite literally we are called to leave our nets and climb out of the safe boat for the journey of the days ahead. We are part of the kingdom of heaven that is at hand. At our fingertips, waiting to be embraced.

That is all well and good, even poetic you might say, but what does it really mean? I believe it means three things. First I believe we are called to reclaim our history. History is never pure truth, it is always seen through the eyes of those who live it. History is always nuanced by the personal experience of the participants. And so, part of reclaiming the history of this place is listening carefully to one another, to hear the piece of truth that each has to contribute. In hearing the truth that each holds, we are as a body empowered to acknowledge what has been painful for others, and to celebrate what has been a blessing and then release that history into our shared story. This is not forgive and forget. Forgive, yes, but not forget. This is acknowledge and learn from what has been, taking what is good into the future and learning from what was hurtful. Our common story is made up of many parts. Some of those parts have been wonderful and some heartbreaking. But all are a part of who we are and taken together make up the fabric of this place

Second, being part of the kingdom of heaven that is at hand, entails answering the current call of God to us. It has been described in a way that I find playful and yet also profound. "What is God up to and what is our part in what God is up to?" I don't often think of God as being "up to" something but it reminds us that God is infinitely creative and spirited, even mischievous with a wry sense of humor. God is up to many things, and we as a community, as part of the kingdom have a part to play in what we see God up to in our midst. I have been told that people at St. Augustine were important parts of the start of the Food Bank, Good Cheer. People of St. Augustine were among those who began the forerunner of Helping Hands. God was up to caring for the needy and people who were part of this community saw what their part was in what God was up to. But our creative, spirited God is never finished always inviting us to come and see what is possible. Come and see what God is up to in South Whidbey and follow on to see what our part as a community might be.

Third, as we move into the future, we are called to continue to seek to bring light into the darkness where ever we find that darkness. Bringing light into darkness is essentially the ministry of hope. As we begin to think in terms of a search for a permanent rector and as we identify the work God is calling us to do to prepare for that new way of living into the kingdom, we are gifted by grace. God walks with us as we step forward into the future whatever that future holds. Jesus proclaimed a kingdom that was at hand, a kingdom of grace and gift. But the catch about the gift of grace is that we have to have the courage to reach out and accept what is given us. I think of grace as that beautifully wrapped package. It is lovely to look at but the only way we know what we are called to by God's grace is to unwrap the package and see what is inside. How do we unwrap that package? How do we as the community of St. Augustine, with all of our challenges, differences, and anxiety really live into the kingdom God calls us to?

Five simple kingdom values will guide us into being the community God is calling us to be. Remember we are all in this together. The strength of the body is greater than any one individual or small group. We are all in this together.

Remember that it is important to understand that what each member brings to the whole is a gift. Value the one who disagrees for the truth they have to offer.

Remember to cultivate the ability to hold tension in life-giving ways.

Be willing to speak up in love and to listen in charity.

Be willing as an individual to participate in the community as it is now not waiting until it is perfect.

Are you ready to come and see?