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John 1:43-51

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Psalms 139:1-5,12-17

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

January 17, 2021

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany

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Whom shall we be?

That's an important question these days and one we must consider. And, not only must we consider it, we must determine what our answer will be. Whom shall we be? It's not a passive question...it doesn't ask who would we like to be or imagine ourselves to be. But ...who *will* we be.

Let me be clear...I am not asking this rhetorically. I am not asking it theoretically. I want us all to answer it honestly. But, first, before we can confidently say who we will be, we need to remember that as people of faith, we are called forth. We are called forth into service to our God. It is from that calling we can begin to answer the question.

The last few weeks, I feel as though I have danced around some very difficult topics. Writing sermons that try to gently navigate the unsettled reality our nation is facing. "Feel-good" sermons isn't the right description but maybe "kindly suggestive" sermons is more accurate. I have kindly suggested that we have a communal responsibility to one another. I have kindly suggested that we can set a better example of what it means to love one another. I have kindly suggested that blessings abound even in the midst of troubled times.

But, this week, I am not feeling so kind. Maybe we have all hit that wall. Where our emotions, our desire for change, our frustration at the world we are currently facing is digging a hole deep within our hearts. We aren't feeling kind. We are feeling determined. We are feeling convicted that this hatred and division must stop. Because this isn't who we want to be. It isn't who we should be. And to rise above the ugliness of our world, we are going to have to face some hard truths about ourselves and how we got here.

So...I wanted to just put that out there and name it. Thankfully, this week, we are presented with a powerful reminder...the reminder that we have been called to live to a higher ideal. Jesus loved to call people forth to a higher purpose. Bad people, good people and folks in between. He called them forth to follow. And in following, they determined who they would be. The old had passed away and the new emerged. Jesus said, this is who you shall be. Now, follow me. Come and See. This is how I want you to live.

And, they believed him. They followed him, at times at great cost. But they followed nonetheless because it mattered.

What do you believe? Whom will you follow? Because I want to be unapologetic about this...we always have a choice. We have a choice about what to believe and who to follow. We have a

choice of how we will live our lives and how we will treat others. We have a choice to live in fear or to live out of love. For me, in the challenges we face in our nation right now, the choice is clear. The alternative to not believe, to not follow is simply unthinkable.

And yet, the unthinkable has been happening. People are fighting their neighbors. They are taking unequivocal stands of superiority. They are claiming God on their side and demonizing anyone or any institution that believes differently. Worse, they are following an individual, an ideology, not the calling that Christ gave them.

And I can't help but wonder...is this division and suspicion the alternative calling we have been following? Is this the content of our character?

I do not believe that Christ called us to this kind of behavior. I do not believe that Christ called us to hate one another or to fight one another. I do not believe that Christ called us to these generalized judgements that are tearing our nation a part. This is not a calling.

So what are we to do?

Jon Meacham, author of *The Soul of America*, quoted St. Augustine in a recent interview: "*A nation is a multitude of rational beings united by the common objects of their love.*" The common objects of their love. Folks, what do we love? What does our love have in common?

We might consider things like fairness, equality, compassion, and justice. Meacham states that whatever those common ways of love may be, those are the things that make us stronger, that unite us, and make us work together for the common good. We are stronger when we build upon our common love, our common calling. Meacham says, there is no other option.

Bishop Curry stated that the way of love must be born out of the beloved community. In other words, we are called to work together, in love, to build a common purpose of wholeness and goodness even in the darkest of times. We are called to reconcile with our enemy, to work towards healing, to strive for justice, and to mend what has been broken.

We are called to be that kind of person. We are called to do the hard work of telling the truth, of repenting of our own sins, our own complicity, of accepting forgiveness, and of renewing our commitment to Christ,

It will take courage. It will take humility. It will take an open heart. But, if we know anything as people of faith it is that peace is worth standing for. Accountability is worth standing for. Asking forgiveness is worth standing for. Reconciliation is worth standing for. And, most importantly, Christ is worth standing for.

Do we use the call of God as a tool for power or a tool for reconciliation? The choice is ours.