

Isaiah 49:1-7

Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away! The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb Yahweh named me. The Holy One made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away. And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." But I said, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God." And now the Lord says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength—he says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers, "Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

John 1:29-42

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

'Our Several Callings'

The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, "Look, here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world"!

John 1:29



"When John the Baptist identifies Jesus he calls him 'the Lamb of God,' which many have interpreted as a sacrifice for sin; however others have pointed out that lambs weren't used for sin sacrifices but only for the Passover sacrifice, which remembers the liberation and deliverance of the people by God. As the Passover Lamb, Jesus liberates the world from slavery to sin by bringing people in the world into new and fresh contact with the presence of God, so that human alienation from God can end. How this liberation and deliverance from alienation happens is the story of the Gospels and the heart of the gospel message".

(UCC Sermon Seeds, 1-19-14)

Today our scriptures are about call and vocation. Not the kind of call that beckons us to visit the refrigerator and the vocation of emptying the freezer of its Ben and Jerry's ice cream cups, but

rather a Divine call into a deeper relationship with God and into specialized work for the Lord. In the reading from Isaiah we find a call to an individual into prophetic ministry and a mission for Israel to 'be a light to the nations.' God said to her chosen people: 'I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation reach to the end of the earth' (vs. 6b).

In the gospel story, Jesus called out to two God seeking men with the question: "What are you looking for?" AKA, "What fresh contact with the Divine Life are you looking for that will lessen your alienation from God?" When they shrugged their shoulders and said, "Where are you staying?" AKA, "We don't know' but our teacher John said you would know," Jesus said, "Come and see." AKA, "O.K., come on in, let's talk".

For a whole day John's disciples hung out with Jesus, listening to what he had to say about the ways in which the Reconciling Spirit was helping them get closer and closer to the heart of God. Since the gospel writer didn't provide any details about what went on or what they talked about that day I like to let my faith imagination fill in the gospel blanks. So what I'm thinking is that they probably spent that day listening to Jesus talk about the Heavenly work of his Abba: healing the sick, teaching, praying, visiting those in prison, freeing those possessed by life taking addictions, welcoming a stranger, loving an enemy, doing no harm, engaging in non-violent resistance to systemic evil . . . you get my 'this is what Jesus did' drift. Then I like to think that sometime during that time together this conversation occurred: Jesus: "How can we know when the darkness is leaving and the dawn is coming?" When we see a tree in the distance and know that it is an elm and not a juniper," ventured one student. "When we can see an animal and know that it is a fox and not a wolf," chimed another. "No," said Jesus, "those things will not help us." Puzzled, the students demanded, "How then can we know?" The Lord's Messiah drew himself up to his full stature and replied quietly, "We know the darkness is leaving and the dawn is coming when we can see another person and know that it is our brother or our sister, otherwise, no matter what time it is, it is still dark."

After spending Sabbath time with Jesus, the men started calling Jesus, Messiah, instead of teacher (which translated means Anointed One), and became disciples of Jesus instead of John. Folks in India sing of this change in identity and vocation in their folk tune of gospel commitment which we now sing.

I have decided to follow Jesus, I have decided to follow Jesus,
I have decided to follow Jesus, I have decided to follow Jesus---
No turning back, no turning back.

Though no one join me, still I will follow, though no one join me,
still I will follow, though no one join me, still I will follow---
No turning back, no turning back.

The world behind me, the cross before me, the world behind me,
the cross before me, the world behind me, the cross before me---
No turning back, no turning back!

The story ends with Jesus changing Simon son of John's name to Cephas (which is translated Peter), who, as you may know became the 'rock' of Christ's Church. Poet Ann Weems wrote:

Sometimes the pages won't turn in our book of dreams
and we are left clinging to a life we never lived just wanted to. Stuck
in the stark reality of unlived dreams,
we snuffle and tread water,
or we go in search of the Holy One
who will wipe the tears from our eyes
and offer to us the only dream that lives.

Annual meeting is coming up. For us what this means is that we have the opportunity to listen again for the Holy Spirit's call to us about the old, new, and several ways in which we can follow Jesus by making specific commitments to lead and support the ministries of First Church. Being called as partners in Christ's service is our way of growing in faith and exercising our spiritual muscles. It's our way of making fresh new contacts with God.

Prayer. Come, Holy Spirit, come. Call us into servant ministries of gospel love and grace. Amen.