

Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

2nd Epiphany
January 15, 2006
Fr Bill McGinty

“Becoming a Butterfly”

Today is the 2nd Sunday of the Epiphany. Today’s readings are a beginning. They are the beginning of Jesus’ ministry and the beginning of that long journey to Jerusalem and to the cross. Over the next fourteen weeks, we will be invited to travel with Jesus the roads and lanes of Galilee. We are invited to journey, in order to learn. The Gospel, the words of Jesus, has things to teach us. You want to know Jesus and what he means, then between now and Easter this is the journey you must take. With the Apostles, that Jesus chooses in today’s Gospel, we are invited to “Come and see”.

Perhaps, the greatest mystery of our lives is what is God and coming to know God. People have a hunger to know the mysteries of the Universe and the mystery of being. But our God is not that easy to comprehend or fathom. Our God is a complexity that is so far removed from us that we can only speak of him in the simplest of terms. It is Jesus in the Gospel that gives us glimpses of God. God as Father, God as forgiveness, God as love. But this knowledge does not come free or cheap. This knowledge exacts a price; the price of having God in our life is our ‘willingness’ to change ourselves.

“Change” I hear you say. “Why do I need to change? I’m pretty near perfect.” How can I give you the bad news, without hurting your feelings? (I know)...imagine that you are a caterpillar. Being a caterpillar is cool you get to have lots of legs, (if you can avoid skunks and birds, you survive very well.) But it is only when you turn into a butterfly, that you realize that there is a higher form of being. Jesus’ life is a lesson in being. His invitation to follow him is an invitation to a Master class, to a higher form of being. Jesus is a life altering experience. The Apostles learn this too. He comes to offer us a “life of the Spirit”, that can elevate us far beyond anything we crave or understand.

Have you noticed how when we crave material things, they never quite live up to our expectation of them? The sports car in the driveway, we wanted for so long? The power tool in the garage we thought we so desperately needed, the boat on the lake that we hardly ever have time to use.

You know and I know that the older we get, the more we want to put aside material things and seek out those things we truly value, friendship, family, love, memories, loyalty, peace and tranquility. We seek them, we crave them and we don’t quite know why. Jesus brings us answers, we crave them because they are virtues that are attributes of God and we are made in his image. To get closer to God, you have to change from a life that is dominated by self to a ‘life of the Spirit.’ That places Christ at the center.

In today’s Gospel Jesus finds Philip and says to him: “Follow me.” It is the call of the Apostles and the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Philip goes and tells Nathaniel about Jesus and Evangelism has begun. That in its simplest form is what Evangelism is all about;

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telling people about Jesus and his story. Yet, before any of us can Evangelize, before any of us can tell the Jesus story, we have to Evangelize ourselves.

In order to do that, you must listen to God speaking to you in your life. Samuel is called by God, in today's first reading. For most of us God's speaking to us is never as clear or plain as that. People in this church have heard God speak to them. And I believe that God has spoken to us all collectively. To hear God you must listen and you must discern, and you must pray. God will not come to you in a lightening bolt or in a thundercloud. He will not come to you in a loud voice from the heavens, but God may speak to you in the quiet of an afternoon alone in your home. God may speak to you from the pages of a book, or the quiet words of your spouse. Sometimes we ignore these disclosure moments, sometimes we pretend to hear the call. And I will even say, sometimes we strain, but can't hear God, when we think we need to, but that does not mean God had not been speaking, more than likely it means that we have not been listening.

It is when we look back at the sweep of our life that we can truly see God's hand, God's guidance and God's word. Even in a twelve month period God speaks and we recognize where we have been and on what road he has met us, and walked with us.

There are four questions that you have to ask yourself every time you think God has broken into your life and spoken to you or gave you an experience that you have to interpret.

- 1.) What does this mean for Me?
- 2.) Where does Jesus fit into this?
- 3.) What are the changes or mandate God is asking of me?
- 4.) How will this impact my community?

We all want to be called. We all want God to speak to us. And we all expect that call on our terms, but God's plan for us, is often so different than our plan for ourselves.

That brings us to prayer and to discernment. If we want to hear God speak to us then we have to pray and we have to pray through the Holy Spirit. Your prayer has to be open to God in your life. Your prayer cannot be about you. If you would answer Jesus' invitation to follow him, then you have to walk his way. We call that Gospel obedience, to follow in his footsteps. Do you know where the word obedience comes from? It comes from *audiere*, meaning to hear. To be obedient to the Gospel, you must hear and hearing you must do.

Can you imagine if each of us turned to the Gospels and really learned from them; listened to Jesus' teaching and incorporated it into our lives? We would be each a powerhouse of Evangelism.

In 1960 John Kennedy challenged the nation when he said "ask not what your country can do for you..." Today, the call to follow Jesus in the Gospel asks us: What can you do for the Gospel? What can you do for Christ's Kingdom? What can you do for Christ's church here today and in this place? Because when we come right down to it, this is where God has placed each one of us. Right here in this place Milford that we call

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home, on the banks of the Delaware. Here is our battleground to bring about everything that Jesus taught and died for. In thirty years, when we are all dead we cannot say to God:

“O I can hear you now, so that is what you wanted me to do. If only I had known. Why didn’t someone tell me we had sick parishioners? Why didn’t anyone invite me to the prison? Why didn’t I know we had a boiler loan? If only I had known we have poor and alone people living so close. So that is why all those poor people were lined up outside the office on a Friday night. We were expected to feed them? A food pantry, you say? Is it too late? Can we still do something? How were we to know?”

Ah, you say it was written in the Gospel. Come on. When did I get time to read? God spoke to me? Honest to God, I didn’t hear him. No, never.

In the sermons? No! He just rambled on, I couldn’t make it out. I always meant to read it on the Website, but you know how things go.”

Life is not a rehearsal. We have to listen and we have to impact our Christianity in a serious way and today. Let us take today’s Gospel and make it our own. That is not Philip and Nathaniel approached by Jesus in the Gospel today. That is you and I.

For the interactive power of the Gospel has Jesus saying to us, today. “Follow me! Come and see what I am calling you to in the year to come.”

So let us, in a prayerful way, respond to today’s Gospel and Jesus’ call.

“Lord Jesus Christ, we hear your call in our lives, and we pledge not to build our Kingdom in this place, but your Kingdom, not to listen to our own voice in this year ahead, but your voice. Not to write our own Gospel, but follow your way.”

Amen+

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