

Pastor Roy's Sermon from January 15, 2017

Children. Gifts and who we are.

Isaiah is calling disciples. He is calling Israel, 2500 years ago to be a light on a hill, a bruised servant sharing wisdom and insight with the nations. Will Israel listen to Isaiah's call?

Jesus also is calling disciples. To what does he call them? He is calling them to set aside their pride, follow him, and learn. He renames Simon. He names him Peter, rock. It's less important what he names him, and more important that he gives him a new name which describes his true self—the Simon Peter who has a place in this new community. Peter learns his new name in this call story much more quickly than the rest of us in our faith journeys.

But the story of Simon's new name reminds us that part of the call from Jesus is learning who we are and then living faithfully to that identity.

Last week we talked about our primary identity and the name given us in baptism: Child of God. That is the foundation of who we are as a congregation and as individuals. We are children of God. When we sit with Jesus Christ, we learn who we are. We learn what is going on all around us. If we listen to Jesus, we will learn. Not because he tells us all the answers, but because he teaches us to listen. . .to learn, and to live faithfully to what we learn.

So listening to Jesus we learn that we are children of God. That is true of all of us. But as we keep listening to the Spirit of Jesus, we also learn about ourselves in relationship to everyone and everything around us. We learn about our gifts. Paul refers to them as gifts of the Spirit.

But sometimes when we use that language, the gift gets lost in the intimidating language. The search for our particular gift sometimes causes us to despair that surely we do not have such powerful gifts. We are not so spiritual, so connected with the Spirit.

But these gifts are not something that we attain, they are something that we already are. We cannot gain them, we cannot lose them. Perhaps if we alter the language a bit we can see more clearly. Try this question:

What is your gift of spirit? Who are you at your very essence? What is the true you? Now a hint, the answer is something good, not bad, because we were not created evil or bad, we are formed well and we all have good gifts.

So listening to Jesus' call we learn we are first and foremost children of God. Then we learn over time by listening to the voice of Jesus--in the many ways he speaks to us—who we are. Of course, this is also true of congregations. Congregations have gifts and personalities, but that is a different sermon. We learn who we are but listening to the Spirit and by listening to others, and by listening to ourselves.

We are called to practice our gifts as we are able. We are called to be a blessing even as we are set apart by the sacrament of baptism and our baptismal vows to serve, to love, to care, to be there for one another and all those whom we meet.

I was reminded of this as Gail and I sat in the waiting room this past Wednesday. We enjoy volunteering on Wednesday mornings at Canine Rescue down on Brittany Lane, walking dogs and giving vaccines and drawing blood (I hold, Gail does the sticking). When I went to leash up one of the dogs this week that I have walked once a week for the past year or two, he grabbed a hold of my arm, and created some lasting memories on my forearm, after which I put him back in his run and we went to Holy Spirit to get stitches. This was a very unusual experience and a particularly troubled dog.

I bring up this experience in the sermon because of the people I met in the Emergency waiting room Wednesday afternoon. There were a number of falls related to the ice that morning, hence it was pretty crowded and the wait was long. But it wasn't long before we started hearing everybody's story and were getting to know one another a bit. There was a very patient older man with memory issues and a wonderful sense of humor. There was a slightly younger older man who spoke loudly and seemed less aware of everyone around him than of himself. There was a little boy who enjoyed wandering around, and tossing his stuffed monkey around and his mother who had a knack for that balance between too much and not enough oversight. He was there related to a close encounter with a double A battery. There was a very well behaved, perhaps 8 yr old boy who had a knot on his forehead, I'm guessing a casualty of the ice storm. There was a youngish man with lower back pain who was glad to use the wheel chair when his number came up. There was a woman behind us, behind a curtain who was an aid in a school who had been punched very hard by a special needs student. She had received a concussion from another student before Christmas. She was very chatty and fairly frustrated with the danger associated with her job, rightly so, but it didn't sound like she was planning on leaving. There was a high school student who broke his leg on the ice that morning and was waiting to have it set in a cast. It might sound odd, but I was deeply touched by the humanity I saw in that room and the opportunity we all had to be there for each other regardless of income, or age, or artificial values assigned to us by marketers and business.

These are gifts of spirit. The Emergency Room has a leveling effect. Crisis moments slow us down and open us up to each other in ways that ordinary days do not. We all have gifts. To be reminded of our gifts we need to listen to each other. We need wonder. We need to be still. We need to turn off some of the messages we keep hearing repeated in our heads. Messages we have perceived from friendly and unfriendly sources. We need to listen to the creator who fashioned us in love and mercy, as beautiful creations in communion with one another, in communion with God, in communion with all of creation.

Let us continue to listen to Jesus for our true identity—who we really are at our core. Let us listen to understand our gift of spirit. Amen