

St. Thomas's Episcopal Parish  
Newark, DE  
The Third Sunday after the Epiphany – January 22, 2017/Year A  
Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1, 5-13; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23  
The Reverend Paul W. Gennett, Jr.

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*May my words reveal the greater glory of God*

AMEN

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As the mission and ministry of Jesus unfolds in Epiphany season, we see different perspectives through the different lenses the Gospel writers were looking through about the call of Jesus to those first disciples.

The **first lens** was Matthew's story of the baptism of Jesus by John, John's witness to this revelation of the prophet's word, and Jesus saying "yes" to God into the wilderness temptations. The **second lens** was John's Gospel, with John the Baptist pointing to "*the Lamb of God come into the world*" which encourages Andrew and another unnamed disciple to follow and hear that eternal question posed by Jesus, "*WHAT are you looking for?*" The **third lens** this day again returns to Matthew as Jesus picks up the mantle of ministry from John the Baptist and calls those **ordinary** fishermen to become **extraordinary** fishers of God's people by their living witness.

**"Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation ..."** We pray our Collect this day, the days following the inauguration of the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, and the Women's March in Washington and throughout cities in our country and, I believe, around the world. A number of women from our parish community marched yesterday. You will know them as those seated in places of the **hot water foot massage units** they asked to be installed today.

As I reflected on today's scripture and the events over this past week and weekend, I was drawn to words offered by Frederick Douglass, the 19<sup>th</sup> century African American abolitionist and tireless worker for justice for ALL God's people. Douglass was an orator, educator, prolific writer, statesman, and child of God. Here is what Douglass said – **"For over 20 years I prayed to God for justice, but I received no answer until I prayed with my feet."**

*"And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."* The light of the Good News of Epiphany shines brightly only when we **pray with our feet and get moving into our world.**

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While the first followers with Jesus had the up front and personal experience of his mission and ministry, it was those who followed the followers that became the constructors of the life in faith we continue to this day. This is where St. Paul comes as the light bearer in our faith living.

In our times, the variety and vagaries of human opinion flies unfettered through our multi-media sources. These times have been particularly active in **taking sides** with one or more voices, who is in or out, who is for or against us. We seem to think that this is unique to us and this time of history. Yet again, I must sadly say that we are not that unique. The human penchant to **divide and conquer** is long lived as we read in Paul's early community of faith in Corinth.

Many of Paul's letters focus on the issues of communities **doing church** in the earliest days of the Christian faith. His letters to the Corinthian community is a model of evangelistic focus and disciple formation for those gathered to bear forth the light that is Jesus Christ TOGETHER.

Imagine the situation faced by this young gathering in Corinth. In their day, crucifixion was a thing of abject shame and derision. It was reserved for the lowest and most venial crimes, and often the most viscous criminals. For those formed in the Jewish traditions, the cross was a hateful thing as described in Deuteronomy – “... *for anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse.*” [21:23] Sensing shame and scandal, the Corinthian Christians thought is best to forget about the cross and move to higher thoughts, with more sensible and stable people than the likes of Paul.

Much like the flash and splash we experience in the mega-church phenomenon of our times, the Corinthians looked for something with more splashy displays of spiritual power. The kind of power they could boast about to others, like the faith healer who **knocks you to the ground to be healed** kind of power. The stuff of prophetic utterances, or speaking in unknown tongues, or water-to-wine miracles would be just the ticket. They did not hear Good News in a dead Jew, but relished any display of spiritual power or wisdom that would elevate them to a higher state spiritually as well as in stature. They wanted Christ WITHOUT the Cross to feed their need for power, fame, ecstatic experiences, philosophical wisdom, and social status.

The truth of the Cross of Christ is that **it can and does create divisions** in the world and divisions within Christianity also. Ironically it is this cross that divides is the very same that can unite in healing power. God continues to call each of us by name in his very Son of God Jesus Christ. The Cross is the power of God's amazing grace, mercy, justice, and love, not because people recognize its power. It is the power of the Cross that draws us into this amazing, salvific grace of God.

The Cross is the power of God working in us in ways that we cannot ask or imagine or do for ourselves. It is this ultimate surrender into and through the Cross that we are truly powerful, and this is the Good News preached then, and now, and yet to come. As Paul says and lives, again and again, “*For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the Gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might be emptied of its power. For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, IT IS the power of God.*”

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Our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry has placed before us a very clear message of WHO and WHOSE we are to be in bearing witness to the world. We are people of **The Jesus Movement**. Now if you have not seen any of his video messages posted on Facebook or the national church website, stay tuned and stay awake – you will be hearing it again, and again, and again. For it is a call to **pray with our feet and get moving into our world**.

Rachel Held Evans is a prolific writer in our day who looks at church and faith from the inside out and outside in. Living in the Bible Belt of Alabama, she pushes the edges of the Emergent Church conversations from her perspective as a **Millennial** – how we love our “categories” to divide and conquer. In a recent podcast on CNN, here is what she said ...

**“Time and again, the assumption among Christian leaders, and evangelical leaders in particular, is that the key to drawing twenty-somethings back to church is simply to make a few style updates – edgier music, more casual services, a coffee shop in the fellowship hall, a pastor who wears skinny jeans, an updated website that includes online giving. What millennials really want from the church is not a change in style but a change in substance. We want an end to the culture wars. We want a truce between science and faith. We want to be known for what we stand for, not what we are against.**

**We want to ask questions that don’t have pre-determined answers. We want churches that emphasize allegiance to the kingdom of God over an allegiance to a single political party or a single nation. We want our LGBTQ friends to feel truly welcome in our faith communities. We want to be challenged to live lives of holiness, not only when it comes to sex, but also when it comes to living simply, caring for the poor and oppressed, pursuing reconciliation, engaging in creation care, and becoming peacemakers.**

**We are not leaving the church because we don’t find the cool factor there. We are leaving the church because we don’t find Jesus there ... deep down, we long for Jesus.”**

**“Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation ...”** To truly be light bearers of the Good News of God’s love in Jesus Christ, we must commit to **The Jesus Movement**.

For it is OUR call to **pray with our feet and get moving into our world**.

*AMEN*