

In the season after the Epiphany our Sunday Scriptures are about the manifestation of God to humanity. Jesus was manifested as God's Messiah to the Magi at Bethlehem, at the Jordan River, and at the Wedding in Cana. There are also preaching, healing, miracles, and the Transfiguration.

God is also manifested through the call to carry out the divine mission. Last week we read of God's call to Jeremiah. This week, we read of God's call to Isaiah and the summons of Jesus for Peter, James, and John to follow him to become "fishers of people." Soon, we will be reminded of God's call to Joseph and to Moses. In each case, we see resistance or impediment to God's call: Joseph was left for dead and sold into slavery in Egypt, so how could he use him? God Moses had a speech impediment; so how could he tell Pharaoh that God said, "Let my people go"? Jeremiah thought he was too young. Isaiah thought he was too sinful. Peter, James, and John were too fearful. And yet, in each case, God promised to use these mortal, flawed, ordinary people for divine, world-changing purposes. The call, the resistance, the resources, and the resulting impact are described right there on the pages of the Sacred Text. And there are many others.

***Let's consider God's call together this morning.***

People often ask, "how can I recognize God's call to me?" It is a question of vocation. The word vocation is derived from the Latin root *voca*, as in "voice." It means "to call." There are so many voices crying out for our attention and our loyalty. So it is difficult to discern the voice of God, and, therefore, to know what God is calling us to do. The question about recognizing God's call may have to do with our overall life mission or with what God wants of us in a specific situation. There are several characteristics of vocation in these and many other Biblical accounts where God's call comes to people and their communities.

***God's call is timely.*** Jesus began his sermon in his home town synagogue by saying, "The time is fulfilled." The kind of time he has in mind is *kairos*, not *chronos*. Chronological time can be measured. *Kairos*, God's time, the right time, cannot be measured so precisely. It is the time when fruit is ripe or when a baby is ready to be born. While God's call may come to us in many ways, it always comes at the right time. Jesus was speaking of the time when the old age of rebellion against God would cease and a new age would begin. He came at right time in history. God's call comes to you and me at the right time in our personal histories and in the history of our faith community.

***God's call involves change.*** Jesus called people to turn, to "repent." Repentance is change. Change usually involves turning *away* from the comfortable and familiar and *toward* something different. Jesus went to a region that was different. Remember that was place where there were many gentiles, people of a different race and faith. God's call can be a turning point for a person or a community.

Jesus said to Peter, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." How many generations of fishermen went before him in the family business? How much did those men have invested in their boats and their gear? Yet, "When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him." What is the next turn for you or for us? Whatever it may be, I'll promise you this; if you hear a call to remain exactly as you are, it is probably not God calling. God's call involves change.

***God's call is imperative.*** Jesus' favorite words, "Repent, believe, follow" are not mere suggestions. The time for action is now. I'm reminded of the story of a golfer whose ball landed atop an anthill. In his attempt to avoid being stung by ants, his stance was clumsy and with every swing he would miss the ball and hit the anthill, scattering hundreds of the tiny creatures. Eventually, one of the ants said, "If we are going to survive, we'd better get on the ball." When we hear God's call, it is time for us to get on the ball!

**God's call is specific.** Jesus is clear about what he wants of his followers: “hear, repent, believe, follow, preach, teach, baptize, pray, go.” The response may involve a person's entire life or a brief period.

Hurricane Katrina slammed into the Gulf Coast 13 ½ years ago and most of you who were living in or near this area still have vivid memories of the aftermath. After the storm, Episcopalians and others went to the coast to help those hardest hit. For a few years, people set about doing some very specific things to help people in need. Many volunteered because they thought it was a good idea or the right thing. Christians didn't just volunteer. They went because they were responding to God's call and that call was specific.

**God's call includes reassurance.** God does not call people to do something that they can do on their own, always provides the means whereby the call can be fulfilled. “I will make you fishers of people,” said Jesus. “Us? We're not rabbis who catch people with their wise teaching; we're fishermen.”

In the Baptismal Covenant, we are asked about several specific ways we will continue to answer God's call to us. In each case, our answer is, “I will, with God's help.” That's the reassurance we need to hear, as did those first disciples. God's call is accompanied by gifts that will be needed in order to be who we are called to be and to do what we are called to do. Ponder this: The things God calls us to do are humanly impossible. That is to say, we need God's help to do what God calls us to do. So, if you feel called to do it all by yourself, it is probably not God calling.

**God's call is consistent.** We believe in Christian counsel. That means we explore our vocations together so that we can be sure that the voice we hear is God's. We allow ourselves to be held accountable by our Christian sisters and brothers as we discern God's will, God's yearning for us, so that we can align our lives, our words, and our actions with that divine yearning. If you believe you are called to do something that is inconsistent with the ways of God as revealed in Scripture, tradition, reason, or experience, it is probably not God calling.

**God's call is persistent.** As we follow the trajectory of the journey of Jesus and his disciples, we see that he was constantly attuned to God's call to him. That call was persistent and, thus, he persisted in his Messianic mission despite obstacles and even in the face of capital punishment, death, and the grave. And then came the Resurrection. St. Paul says it was all “in accordance with the Scriptures.” In other words, the Resurrection of Jesus is the fulfillment of God's persistent message of hope and life.

Last Sunday afternoon, I attended a Court of Honor in which seven of Troop One's Scouts were presented with the Eagle Scout emblem. Among other things, that badge represents persistence; the persistence of those seven young men – in the face of fear, through feelings of inadequacy, learning to use a map and compass to find their way, figuring out how to paddle a canoe and use it to shoot the rapids, rappelling down a cliff, trying to stay warm and dry in a tent on a cold, wet, winter night. They persisted! Maybe the other 99% didn't, but they did. And so they from now on they are Eagle Scouts. But they didn't do it alone. They were a part of a larger body of persistence – parents, leaders, fellow scouts, mentors – all of whom persisted in encouraging the Scouts onward toward their objectives, using the resources they've been given to overcome the obstacles in their path. It's like that with God's call. God never stops trying to get our attention and never stops encouraging us on. “From now on,” said Jesus. God's call is persistent.

**Keep listening. And, when the call comes, recognize it, receive it as gift, and let God's grace motivate you to drop everything and go!**

The ongoing expression of God's call to us is in this Banquet. Week by week, we practice getting up and going as we approach the Altar of God. It is also the communion of those who are willing, in spite of circumstances or limitations or inner resistance, to be open to that call when it comes and to receive the grace of God that is necessary to fulfill that call to the honor of God and for the sake of the world for which Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose again.