

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections based on this week's lectionary readings

January 19, 2014

Second Sunday After Epiphany, Year A

The readings this week:

- Isaiah 49:1-7 ◦ Psalm 40:1-11
- 1 Corinthians 1:1-9 ◦ John 1:29-42

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Come and See, by Peter Woods, [I am listening](#)

I have always been one of those people who need to verify things experientially. It is never enough for me to hear how something works, I want to experience it. I am not sure if this is a helpful trait to have, but it has made for some interesting experiences!

Because I am an experiential learner I appreciate the sequence of events that are described in this gospel passage.

John who has the experience of baptizing Jesus, who has seen the Spirit descending upon him in the form of a dove, is able to confidently point to Jesus as "The sacrificial lamb of God" and then to wax theological about the destiny of Jesus *vis a vis* Israel. That was John's experience and insight.

Two disciples of John then decide to follow Jesus, meet him and enquire about where he lives. This question is far deeper than merely an inquiry after an address. Amongst the [Xhosa people](#) of Southern Africa, there is a form of introduction which goes, "*U velaphi?*" It means, "*Where do you come from?*" In the customs of the Xhosas, the appropriate answer to the question is not to give an address, but to declare your clan heritage. The answer is self-revelatory far beyond geography. The question is one of identity not of location. I believe the question of the disciples, "*Where are you staying?*" has similar dimensions.

Having had the benefit of John's theological identification of Jesus as the "*Lamb of God*", I just love the way Jesus doesn't respond, "*Don't you know who I am?*", or "*What have you heard?*" as so many self-styled, egotistical messiahs would answer. Jesus' response is a simple invitation to "*Come and see.*"

This response is so beautiful because it is open ended and does not require any prior pre-judged concepts of Jesus.

Isn't that the miracle of the Jesus journey? Despite the countless layers of encrusted doctrine, dogma and determined identities that the Church has put onto Jesus as well as the requirements so many communities put on prospective followers before they even begin, Jesus does not.

His invitation is simply to experience. Come and see. It is an invitation to unprejudiced, undetermined, encounter.

It is an adventure where the disciple and the teacher are in relationship and not merely formulaic ritual.

It is the path to life.



Praying Toward Sunday

Loving God
help us to believe in you
more and more each day
and to do all you ask of us
so that we may shine
with the light you give us.
Fill us Lord and set us glowing
we ask it in Jesus' name.
Amen

Richard G. Fairchild

Reflecting on the Word



Proclaim and Tell

1st Reading: [Isaiah 49:1-7](#)

Isaiah's message begins with a response to a "call." What is a call? Have you ever felt called? (One author suggested that a call is an internal "insistence" – sort of an internal "pressure" which makes us interested in certain things, avoid other things and seek to find our satisfaction in the direction of the "call.") The Servant of God was a speaker. Knowing how to speak and what to speak is the challenge of a lifetime. Here the Servant recognizes that his mouth is like a "sharp sword"; i.e., it has to be ready to slice to the heart of things. Can you think of times when you felt called to use your mouth like a "sharp sword"? (Tough love?) [Suquamish United Church of Christ](#) Has there ever been a time that you needed to hear the words of a "sharp sword"? How has God used this tool in your life and who was instrumental in speaking in love?

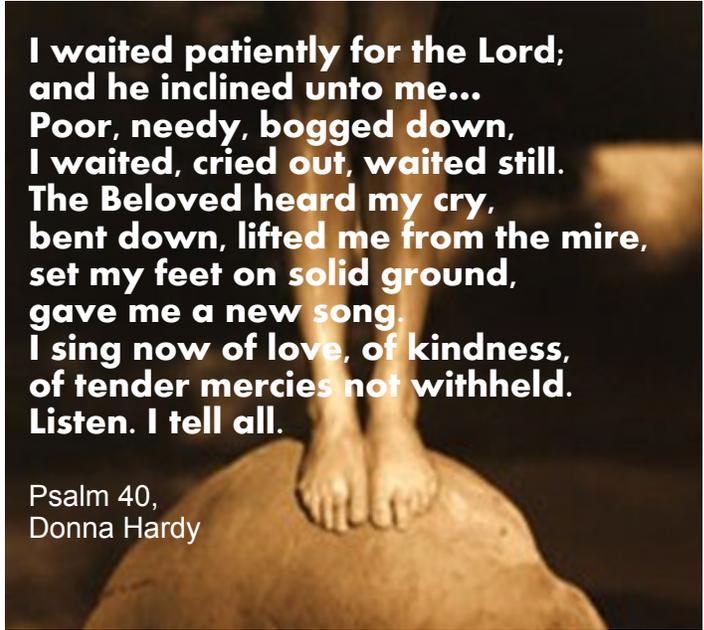
Psalm Reading: [Psalm 40:1-11](#)

When faced with great trouble, what did David first reflect on? Do you find yourself following David's example? Why or why not? Do you find it difficult to wait on the Lord as David did? In what areas of life are you currently waiting on the Lord? Has there been a time in your life in which you cried out to the Lord and he delivered you from a troubling situation? "Proclaim and tell" of God's wondrous deeds by journaling your thoughts. How did those who witnessed God's deliverance of David respond? What does this teach us? What implications does this have on how we relate to unbelievers? [Study the Text](#)

1 Corinthians 1, "Called In"

When I was a child, playing hide-and-seek outside in the waning daylight of a summer evening, inevitably our front door would open and my mother's voice would call, "Jack, time to come in!" I would go on with hide-and-seek as though nothing had happened. To anybody passing by, I looked no different from my playmates. But I *was* different; I had been "called in"; everything was changed. In a similar way Christians -- who may appear no different from others -- have ringing in their ears God's summons to believe and to obey. Henry Thoreau said that some march to a different drummer. Christians do not hear a different drumbeat; they hear Jesus' distant but clear voice saying, "Come, follow me." It sounds over the whir of the lathe, the cry of a baby, the clink of coins, the curses of enemies, the whisper of success, the roar of the crowd, the nagging of conscience.

From [Hearers of the Call](#), by John C. Purdy



**I waited patiently for the Lord;
and he inclined unto me...
Poor, needy, bogged down,
I waited, cried out, waited still.
The Beloved heard my cry,
bent down, lifted me from the mire,
set my feet on solid ground,
gave me a new song.
I sing now of love, of kindness,
of tender mercies not withheld.
Listen. I tell all.**

Psalm 40,
Donna Hardy

3rd Reading: [1 Corinthians 1:1-9](#)

Where does our identity come from? How does this affect who we are and how we see ourselves? What was Paul's identity in Christ? Did he have any doubt about his calling and mission? Do you see yourself as having a calling on your life? Why did Paul have to defend his call to the Corinthians? Was Paul just a preacher among many? Do you ever have to "defend" yourself as a Christian to other Christians? Is our identity in Christ Jesus enough to make us bold for the kingdom of God? Is this boldness something that can even overcome persecution? Is boldness for the kingdom of God something you want in your life? Is verse 6 a testimony of Christ confirmed in our words and deeds, or are we silently hoping people will "see" we are different? What could we do to turn our witness into a bold statement of God's love? [Wildwood Ignited](#)

4th Reading: [John 1:29-42](#)

Why did Jesus want to be baptized by John as an ordinary man, as a common sinner? John called Jesus "The Lamb of God". Why? Can you explain the symbolic meaning of these words? Why does John direct his disciples to Jesus? Why did Jesus not give the disciples of John a "straight" answer to their question: "Where do you live?" He just invited them to come and see. If we want to know more of Jesus, what have we to do? Is Jesus calling people today also to "go and stay with him?" How is he calling? When have you seen something that seemed like the manifestation of the Holy Spirit? How has that influenced your life? Have you ever invited someone to "come and see"? What happened? Has anyone else ever invited you to "come and see"? What happened? [ribessj.org](#) and [Sunday Scriptures](#)