

21 January 2024, Third Sunday after Epiphany, B
Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa
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[3 Epiphany, Year B: Jonah 3:1-10; Psalm 62; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20]

And Zebedee said, “What... just happened?”

Actually, I have a different question.

What does love see?

One of the things we crave as human beings is to be seen. Of course, there are times we want to hide, perhaps sometimes quite appropriately; sometimes there’s someone we don’t want to see us, sometimes quite appropriately. But I mean our profound need and desire to be seen as who we really are by the eyes of love and acceptance. If we feel someone doesn’t really get us, doesn’t have a clue about who we really are, the love and acceptance don’t feel, well, real, even if the best intentions are present.

For some of us, it’s more complicated than for others. Some of us had to hide in order to survive, and when that’s the case, coming out of that hiding, making ourselves available and accessible to the eyes and the love of others, can be easier said than done. Some of us felt seen and accepted and loved for who we were and are in our families of origin, thanks be to God; others, not so much. And of course, sometimes people see more of us than we realize, or see more *in* us than we can see ourselves.

But I imagine you may be thinking now of those moments when you felt seen for who you are, and held in that gaze of acceptance and love. And thinking of those eyes, those hearts, and the names of those who have, in your life, *seen* you. What was that like? What did it do for you? It gives us *life*, doesn’t it? And courage. And joy.

It’s a gift, but it’s also a challenge, a challenge to live into our truth, to be who we are.

And perhaps you are recalling moments when you had the grace to see into someone, in a moment of vulnerability, see into their truth, a seeing that only love can do.

As I approached this gospel reading today, of Jesus calling these first disciples, Simon, Andrew, James, John, I thought of our first reading of two weeks ago, for the Baptism of Christ, the very beginning of the Book of Genesis. When Jesus calls and these fishers immediately leave their nets to follow him, isn’t it a bit like:

Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light?

The Lord speaks, and it happens.

Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

And indeed, it’s worth reading this story as a creation story, a new-creation story, a renewal-of-creation story.

Here is Jesus, at the very beginning of his ministry, and what does he do? He speaks a word and calls people into relationship, into community, into service.

Here is Jesus, so to speak, beginning the work of reassembling our broken humanity, restoring the dignity of our human nature, by bringing human beings into companionship with himself, in alignment with his humanity, calling us into the communion and the life he shares with the One he calls Abba, Father.

But when I read the passage from Mark again, I noticed another word, another verb, that I've always tended to bypass:

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets.

He *sees* them. It's the *seeing* that catalyzes the call. In scripture, sometimes the little words that are so easy to skip over can hold so much. He *saw* them. And this can carry us back to Genesis again:

And God saw the light, that it was good.

God sees what God has created, and sees that it is good: beautiful, delightful, attractive. The human eyes of Jesus, scanning the shore of Galilee, are the eyes of the Creator, contemplating the goodness of creation and seeing, in this particular moment, the goodness of these hardworking young men, seeing them completely, seeing their struggles, their hopes, their disappointments, their anxieties, but above all seeing that they are beautiful—seeing their beauty and goodness as holy beings, images of God, seeing their kinship with himself, seeing that they belonged with him.

Seeing that now was the moment for a word of new creation. He *saw* them.

If it's just a story of Jesus calling out to these men, presumably strangers (but we don't really know that), and they immediately up and follow him, I think we'd rightly be left with some questions: what's going on here? Some kind of hypnosis or mind control? And indeed, it's important to read on in the story to ask, what kind of relationships will these be? Who is this Jesus, and what does he really want with these young men? What kind of *power*, exactly, is he exercising here?

But I think we are given the strongest clue in that little verb that's so easy to skip over: he *saw* them. And I would venture to guess that they knew in some ineffable but unmistakable way that he saw them, saw them in the truth of who they were, and saw more in them than they could ever imagine.

And in being seen, they came alive, and coming alive, they came along behind the one who had seen them and called them with such delight... and here we are. Here *we* are. There's a straight line, isn't there? from that moment to this. Jesus is still seeing us, and calling us. This story today is our story, the story of why we are here today, responding to the call of Jesus as he continues his work of reassembling and restoring our broken humanity, showing us and, we pray, showing the world, what human relationship and human society is meant to look like.

Perhaps one way to think about why we are here, why we come back, is not only that God calls us, but before that, that God sees us, sees us truly, completely, as only infinite love can see. You and I are utterly seen, utterly known, utterly loved and accepted and delighted in by the Holy One whom we have come to know in the humanity of Jesus, through the eyes and the voice of Jesus.

Through the human eyes of Jesus, and his human heart and human voice, there along the shore of Galilee, these first disciples were seen, delighted in, loved, and called. Even so, our human eyes and hearts and hands and voices are invited into the creator's loving, restorative, healing, transformative work, the work of new creation.

I love the way I see that happening here at Incarnation. I see people here finding the freedom to be who they are, to tell their stories without fear, and in that freedom to find ongoing transformation, and the great gift of being appreciated and adored just for being who they are. Speaking for myself, I know that in these recent years, I have felt more and more safe to be more and more who I am among you. I mean, a work in progress. But I am so grateful. And I know I am not alone.

We are not perfect. We have not “arrived” and in this life we never will. But it's worth naming this

grace that God is pouring out here, naming it so that we can give thanks for it, and that we make seek to be more available to what God is doing here, this new-creation work of seeing, loving, delighting, calling, transforming, serving.

To see one another and the world around us more and more with the eyes of the Creator, the eyes of Jesus, even as we are seen and known and loved into the challenge of being who we are, finding ourselves grafted into the new humanity Jesus is creating, and empowered to celebrate and serve this beautiful and broken and *good* creation.