

Sermon

Epiphany 3 Year B—January 21, 2018

Saint Mark's Episcopal Church, Charleston SC

The Reverend Dr. Philip C. Linder

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.
Amen.

For God alone my soul in silence waits; truly my hope is in him.

(*Psalm 62*) Perhaps Simon and Andrew as they were casting their nets into the sea were reflecting upon their faith and trust in God. Maybe James as he sat at the shoreline mending his broken net was listening for the voice of God. We know that often in the midst of our solitary manual work, we find it to be as well a time conducive for prayer and reflection.

Whatever these first disciples were thinking or praying, we read that upon hearing Jesus' call, ***Follow me and I will make you fish for people,*** they left their nets and followed him. But more than that, they

left the life and work that they had known, to respond to the call of our Lord to that which for them was yet unknown. Again, from today's appointed Psalm 62, *Put your trust in him always, O people, pour out your hearts before him, for God is our refuge.*

This morning I want to briefly examine with you what this Gospel of Jesus' calling to the disciples and their choosing to follow Him has to say to us; our life's work, and our choosing joy.

I remember so well the time at the Board of Directors meeting for Kanuga Episcopal Conference Center, that we bid farewell to three retiring members. A ritual that surrounded this occurrence was the planting of a tree in honor of each of those completing his or her term of office. As the rain began to lighten and the sun made its first appearance, we all walked down to the lake. Here, three newly planted Frazier firs stood. Our group gathered, a passage from Genesis was read, and prayers of thanksgiving for the beauty of God's creation proclaimed. Each retiring board member then fastened around the tree a small plaque in his or her honor. In fact, what is amazing to see when one walks the vast grounds and woods of Kanuga, where this year our Diocesan Clergy will hold its annual retreat, are all the plaques on the buildings, rooms, benches, playgrounds, and trees, given for a loved

one's memory, or in thanksgiving. And one cannot escape the notion that all those plaques have something to do with the deep human longing to leave a legacy...to plant something that will live on long after we are gone. And our desire to leave a legacy seems to be most fully addressed in how we live our lives.

What has been or is your life's work? Is it being responsive to the belief that God is calling you to be all that you can be in this life; "You are Beloved." The very first time I really heard, really digested the word "beloved," was behind the altar of St. Martin in the Fields in Atlanta, Georgia. I was the brand-new Assistant Rector/Youth Minister, at my first celebration of the Holy Eucharist in that wonderful church. The Reverend Martin Dewey Gable, affectionately known as "Father Gable," was the celebrant—I was his deacon. Father Gable held the paten and chalice up to the people just before communion, and looking into their eyes announced, *Beloved, these are the gifts of God for the people of God. Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith with thanksgiving.*

The dictionary defines beloved as, *dearly loved*. We hear this word dramatically proclaimed by God from the heavens, as John baptizes Christ in the Jordan River in the opening verses of Mark's Gospel: *And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I*

am well pleased. (*Mark 1:11*) God announces for all to hear that the Father dearly loves Jesus. And in so doing, in our relationship through Christ to God, we too become children of God that are dearly loved—beloved. Yet, this can be a very difficult truth for us to practically understand and live into each day. What does it mean if God considers you to be *beloved* in his eyes?

What if at the most significant level it means that God, with wide-open arms, accepts and loves you for exactly who you are? To be *beloved* by God is to have a God that is like a parent who is intimately involved in the decisions, activities, and desires of your life. To be *beloved*, is to have a relationship with a God that listens, cares, and is calling you to a life. I think that Simon Peter, Andrew, and James somehow knew this sense of being beloved of God as Jesus calls them to come, ***Follow me and I will make you fish for people.*** When you believe that you are beloved, you also believe that God has a plan for you...God calls to you. At every celebration of the Holy Eucharist since Father Gable's untimely death, I have continued this tradition of calling the people of God beloved, to honor a great priest and mentor, but even more to remind each of you that God loves you and calls you to life.

And finally, in this season of Epiphany, choose joy. If you are not doing what you love and loving what you do, you will never be able to live joyfully. Simon Peter, Andrew, and James were choosing a vocation that would give them joy. Remember that joy is not the same as happiness in all things, but rather it is an overriding experience within the heart and mind, from a knowing that God loves you and calls you to life. And this may be through your daily work, or perhaps through the ways that you give of your time to serve in the church, community, and world.

Are you joyful in the present direction of your life? Imagine that Jesus Christ is approaching you and saying, ***Come, follow me.*** Let's drop our nets and go...***Amen+***