

Second Epiphany, Hickory Neck Episcopal Church, 19 January 2014

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Isaiah 49:1-7; Ps 40:1-12; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42

S.D.G.

As he prepared to leave the White House, and enter what has become a very notable retirement, a reporter asked then President Jimmy Carter if he had plans for his post presidential days. President Carter is said to have remarked that he planned to become a good fly fisher. The irony of that statement is that he was already a proficient fly fisher; his staff would often sneak him out of the White House and secretly helicopter him to a private stream near Gettysburg where he spent the day fly fishing for trout. His statement reflected both modesty and the realization that fly fishing is an activity that one can never truly master.

Often referred to as “standing in cold water and waving a big stick” the object of fly fishing is to present a hand tied fly to the fish in a manner that so mimics nature that the often reluctant fish can not resist what appears to be a tasty bug. Flies are fashioned with an assortment of fur, feathers, yarns and odd bits of ribbons and string. By careful observance of bugs, fish and nature it becomes possible to discern patterns and habits. Fly fishing is about being a part of the surrounding world in such a way that when the fly, as bait, is presented it also seems to be a part of nature, indistinguishable as artificial or man made.

Curiously, we have a little fishing going on in the Gospel today some of which is so cleverly disguised as to be indistinguishable from the world around it.

Over the course of three days, Jesus is seen walking about town where he is noticed by John the Baptist, Andrew with an unnamed disciple, and later meets Simon who is to be called Peter. We know that it is often the habit of Jesus to be in solitude and quiet prayer and contemplation. It makes one wonder if he was presenting himself to be seen by John, Andrew, and Peter. His own habits seemed so natural that each took the bait. When John the Baptist saw him he declared him to be the Lamb of God. And he gives credibility to this claim by describing the Holy Spirit, as a dove, descending upon the Christ.

The next day Andrew sees Jesus and with his companion, who is thought by many to be Saint John the writer of this Gospel, casts out his own bait. Andrew is not particularly

interested in seeing the place where Jesus is staying as much as he wants to be invited to sit with him and talk. To this end Andrew presents his bait as he asks “where are you staying.” He believes that Jesus has taken the bait when the response is “come and see.” Andrew has the invitation that he was fishing for, to sit and talk with the man he hopes is the Messiah.

And then the third day, Andrew brings his brother Simon to Jesus. Telling Simon that he is to be called Cephus, or Peter, Christ brings both Andrew and Simon Peter into his fold; the first disciples have begun to follow Jesus.

For many, this is the event that marks the origin of the Christian Church. Andrew, Peter, and the disciple who is most likely Saint John have come together to follow Jesus. We hear this in Matthew and the Prayer of Saint Chrysostom, “when two or three are gathered together in his Name you will be in the midst of them.” We are not meant to be Christians in solitude, we are invited into a community of Christians; and it is in community that we find our faith.

I am not inclined to believe that Jesus just happened to walk past John the Baptist, nor stroll by Andrew, the first disciple, on the next day. I suspect that Jesus presented himself so naturally that John and Andrew felt it only natural to take the bait. Jesus chose John the Baptist because he was paving the way for the coming of Christ. John was living into his calling.

Jesus also chose Andrew. Andrew lived into his calling by bringing others into the fold. It was Andrew who introduced Jesus to the young boy with the loaves and fishes at the feeding of the 5000. Most notably he brought his brother Simon, who would be Peter, to also follow as a disciple.

At that first meeting Jesus called Simon the “rock”; and we later learn that this is the rock upon which the foundation of the church is laid. During Christ’s earthly ministry Peter was hardly the rock. While he did publicly declare Jesus to be the Christ, he continually questioned Jesus. And when presented with the story of Christ’s impending death he denied that this should occur. Met with the stern rebuke “get behind me satan” Peter was not yet showing himself to be the rock. And it was Peter who would deny Jesus three times before the cock crowed just before the crucifixion. It was only after the death and resurrection that Simon Peter became the force that Jesus had called to this ministry.

With the death and resurrection of Jesus, Simon Peter also died to his former self and was resurrected into the life and calling that Jesus had seen within him all along. Jesus did not call Simon Peter to be a disciple for who he was, but he called him for who he would become. The rock was always deep within Simon Peter's being, but it was hidden beneath layers of human folly. Chipping away at those layers the real essence and calling of Peter became visible; something that Jesus had seen within him all along.

Jesus calls us too. We are not necessarily called for who we are, but for who we will become. As we live fully into the life of Christ so too will our own calling become apparent to us and to others. Christ has already seen who we will become and that is why he calls us.

Christ made certain that Andrew would take the bait and become a disciple. Andrew, a fisherman, then became a fisher of men and also brought his brother Simon Peter into the boat. Together their vocation became their ministry, they were both fishers of men. And ultimately Peter's true ministry emerged.

Our own ministry may be hidden beneath layers of human folly. We may not yet have died to our own desires and risen fully into the life of Christ. But Christ can still see who we will become, who we are deep within our soul.

When fly fishing the fly is presented as naturally as possible on the water. To the untrained eye there is nothing there but a babbling brook or running stream. But the trained eye can see beneath the water and see the fish that lurk beneath the surface. It is what is under the surface that the fly fisher is interested in.

And it is under the surface where our true calling lies, that is what attracted the attention of Christ. We must peel back the bonds of human folly and expose our true selves, live into our true ministry.

It was President Carter who said that he was going to become a good fly fisher, an interesting statement from someone who by all accounts was already very experienced. Christ has already seen who we are to become, it is our role to become that much better at being. Being who we already are deep inside our soul, being who we are called to be. Dying to our old self and being resurrected to the life that Christ has seen in us. Being an Easter people. Alleluia.

Amen,