



“The Invitation”

Sermon by the Rev. Patricia Farris

John 1:43-51

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Our annual renewal of baptismal vows is a beautiful service. It gives us all the opportunity to pause at the beginning of this New Year and focus on who we are—who we really are—who we hope to become—in the sight of God and as members of this community, the church. It causes us to remember that in our baptism, God calls us, names us, claims us, gifts us and empowers us to be the person God is creating us to be.

The wonderful author, Kathleen Norris, notes that to the earliest Christians, the Baptism of Jesus--the story found in all four gospels--was as important as Christmas itself—important because it indicates “that the incarnation [God made flesh] is not only about Jesus [and what God is revealing to us in Jesus]—but about us...[it] demonstrates to Christians not only what God is like but also who God wishes us to be.”

For in baptism, God claims us as God’s own—each of us--precious, beloved, entrusted and upheld by God. In our baptism, God trusts us with the name “child of God” so that, knowing ourselves to be special and loved, we can share that love with all whom we meet. In our baptism, God sends the Holy Spirit to anoint us with caring and compassion. In our baptism, God sends the Holy Spirit to empower us to spend our lives on others.

God created each of us with an inherent desire to make a difference. Baptism is about who God is and who God wishes us to be in this world. About who God wishes us to be for this world. About the kind of person God creates us to be, a person who embodies, in our own way, in our own life, in our own family, in our own work, in our own circle of friends—a child of God who embodies the marks of the Kingdom. Compassion. Justice. Generosity. Caring. In our baptism, we are blessed to be a blessing.

You know, in recent years, there has been a lot of emphasis in writings about human development and leadership centered around the concept of finding the ONE thing that we do best, the ONE passion we have, the ONE thing we really care most about, the ONE most important gift God has given us. Now that focus can be helpful if you feel mostly scattered and distracted by too many things. But the fact of the matter is, most of us are gifted in a variety of ways. Many things tug on our hearts. We have lots of thoughts, many ideas, a variety of people who hope to influence in a positive way—our children, grand-children, and family; our co-workers; our neighbors; our friends.

If you’re that kind of person, you may wonder how you could ever possibly narrow that focus to ONE thing. Being that kind of person myself, I was intrigued by an article I read recently. The author expressed some jealousy regarding the Three Kings who followed the star to the manger. He noted somewhat ruefully that “they walk briefly onto the stage of history with one task: [to] pay homage to a newborn king. They have found their vocation, and they pursue it single-mindedly.”

Most of us, he noted, don’t have that singularity of purpose. Our guiding light “will be more like a constellation, several stars forming a coherent image, each star burning bright at different seasons of life....” So for most of us, he says, our goal “lies more in finding the pattern among [our] various gifts and passions and letting each one shine brightly at the right time...[following that] coherent constellation with several stars, because God seems to be up to quite a lot.”

Indeed, God IS up to quite a lot—in our lives and in the life of our congregation. Just look at all that’s going on. It’s amazing.

So this what a perfect day to install our officers and church leaders for 2018. These are folks who have agreed to step up and give of their time and talent and gifts and passion and hopes and dreams to help guide and direct our mission and ministry. Know them pray for them throughout the year. They’re a great group of faithful, sincere, dedicated fellow Christians. Like each of us, they bring a gorgeous variety of gifts, which they share daily with their family and friends. We are fortunate to celebrate and support their leadership today, grateful that they dedicate some of their time, energy and spirit to leadership in the life of the church. They’re not all alike, nor would we want them to be. Together they create a beautiful constellation of leadership that will guide us well in our mission and ministries in this New Year.

As we move towards baptismal renewal this morning, I’m going to first invite our ushers to come forward now to receive our tithes and offerings. As the offering is received, I’d also like you to take out the index card that was in your OOW this morning and write on it clearly the name with which you were baptized, your Christian name, first and middle. Bring your card forward when you come in a few moments to renew your baptismal vows. The pastors will read from these, collect

them in these baskets, and then place them all on the altar table this morning, as a symbol of the rededication of our lives to God this day. We will also give you the gift of a small shell to remind you of your baptism. Keep it in your pocket or your purse—somewhere it will remind you of the hope of this day.

If you have not been baptized and would like to be baptized this morning, please just let us know as you come. In our lives and in our world, God is indeed up to quite a lot. Be part of it! Let the beauty and power of this day renew your life, ground you in the truth of your baptism, cause you to rejoice in the constellation of God-lit stars that guide you along life's way, and free you to know that, thanks to God, the star you most need for this season of life, burns brightly.

Notes:

Kathleen Norris. "Living by the Word: Marked for a purpose." *The Christian Century*, Dec. 25, 2007.

L. Roger Owens: "Follow Your Stars?" *Faith and Leadership*, Dec. 12, 2017.