

2 Epiphany A 2020

Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalm 40:1-12

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

John 1:29-42

This is my story!
A woman said to me once,
In great excitement,
When she first heard a narrative from John's gospel.

When I hear this story, she said,
It helps me understand myself,
What has happened to me,
How God has changed my life.
This is my story!

I will never forget
The power of that moment,
When she claimed the gospel as her own.

And I remember another time,
When a man,
Looking at the ruins of his life,
Said sadly,
How did this become my story?

That's our question for now,
Like it or not.
How did we end up here,
We ask ourselves,
Looking at the shambles of our national life
And threats to life on our planet.
How did this become our story?
It's not much fun,
To feel trapped in the story of now.

But here's the good news.
We are in the story of now,
But we are not trapped here.
We have another story,
A bigger and better story,
Hidden within the same old here and now.

This bigger and better story
Is the dream Martin Luther King,
our great prophet, showed us.
This bigger and better story
Where we, as he preached,
Make this old work into a new world,
This story
Has a promise and a happy ending,
But that end is over the horizon,
Beyond our sight.

The story begins in many places.
Once we are inside it,
We can learn to see it changing everything,
Renewing hope,
Lending strength,
Offering vision.

One of the beginnings is here.

This gospel story,
In which Andrew and another person
Follow Jesus,
Is our story.

Some of us choose our story,
Sometimes a story is given to us.

This story was given to us
By people we do not know,
For reasons we may never discover.

More than a hundred years ago,
The men and women who built this church
Changed its name.
This is the same parish that started out
In a different building,
In a different place,
And with a different name.
That's part of our story.
But we built this sanctuary, moved here,
And took a new name.
Once we became St. Andrew's,
Andrew became our patron,
And his story of seeking and finding –
Seeking and finding the Christ

Became our story.

What do we learn about ourselves,
If we embrace this story as our own?

We have talked, often,
about ourselves as a community of seekers.
When we hear the question of Jesus,
What are you looking for? –
We wonder.
What are we looking for?

We like to think of ourselves as welcoming;
We echo the invitation of Jesus,
Come and see.

Over the years,
we have looked at the bold proclamation of Andrew,
We have found the Christ.
And we have wondered together,
Is that something we can say?
Something we want to say?

How is this story our story?
What does Andrew the finder offer
To this community of seekers?

Does he offer a challenge,
Or an invitation?
Does he inspire us?
What happens within and among us
When we hear him say,
We have found the Christ?

Is that our story?

Stories unfold slowly.
We hear one word first,
Or one phrase,
Or one image comes alive,
Or we connect with one event.
Later on another layer of meaning opens up,
The sequence of events becomes more clear.

And maybe, as the story unfolds
the gift of a new question

Brings fresh insight.

There is a question
At the center of this story,
And we almost always miss it.

That's easy to understand.
It's very hard for us to hear the question,
Reading this story in translation.
But even if we read it
In the original,
Our ears might not be tuned to hear it.
You have to stay in this story for a long time
Before this question
Lets itself be known.

Jesus asks Andrew and his companion,
What are you looking for?
And they respond with another question,
Teacher, where are you staying?
Where are you staying?

Today, when I hear this gospel,
I hear this question at its very heart.

Where are you staying?
Where is your dwelling?
Where do you abide?
Where will you remain?

Look again, listen again:

John the Baptist sees the Holy Spirit
Descend on Jesus like a dove,
And *remain* there.

Andrew asks Jesus,
Where are you *staying*?
They come and see where he is *staying*,
And they *remain* with him.

They stay with him,
And share the first of many meals.
What happens at the last meal Jesus shares with his friends?
Abide in me, he says,
as I in you.

I am the vine;
you are the branches.
If you *abide* in me,
you will bear much fruit.

When they speak of staying,
Remaining, abiding,
Jesus and his friends hear the witness of the psalms and prophets,
Who say to God, over and over,
I love the place where your glory *abides*.

Staying,
Remaining,
abiding,
dwelling.
This is all the same word.

These words take time
to root down into our souls.
In the frantic story of here and now
We are always on the move,
Always checking our screens,
Staying busy, busy, busy.
Staying still,
remaining in the moment in and out of time,
takes discipline for us.

Abiding, remaining, is not our thing.
It's easy to dismiss Andrew's question,
Where are you staying,
and fast forward
to the invitation, come and see.
But the question,
Where are you staying,
Andrew's question,
becomes,
if we can stop and listen to it,
a question
that says everything
about who Jesus is,
and how we can connect with him,
and how that might change us,
and our world.

What might it mean to see where Jesus is staying,

and remain with him there?

What does staying,
remaining,
abiding really mean?

The insight of at least one scholar*
Is that abiding is the way
John's gospel speaks of prayer.

Indwelling, abiding,
Remaining together,
The communion of souls
Who live together in friendship and love –
That's the heart of prayer.

And prayer is where we are called to be right now –
Or so I believe.

This is how Andrew's story
Becomes our story,
When we learn,
With him, to abide.

We can't fix the world.
But we can
Choose the faithful discipline
Of remaining within it,
Abiding in love,
Staying in hope.

We can't fix the world,
But we can be witnesses within it,
And perhaps,
Fearful and wonderful as it may seem,
Become, ourselves, open spaces within it.
Could we open up holy spaces
Where Jesus could abide?

Is that what Andrew did?

Before he went out,
found his brother,
and made his bold statement,
We have found the Christ,
Andrew learned to remain with Jesus –

Jesus, the one in whom God's glory abides.

He learned, or began to learn,
or at least caught a glimpse of the longing to learn,
how to abide in Jesus,
as Jesus longed to abide in him.
Only when Andrew began to stay with Jesus
Could he find the truth –
In coming to stay with Jesus
He had found the place
Where God's glory abides.

How did that happen?
How might it happen now?
How does the human spirit open up,
so that there is room inside it
for the one in whom all the fullness of God
is pleased to dwell?

There are many ways to open up a holy space within.
For some it happens through music.
For some it happens in the meditation time
at the end of a yoga practice.
For some it happens running, or swimming.
For some it happens in centering prayer,
and for others in handing out socks and towels
to the homeless, or doing their laundry.
For some, in moving beyond acts of loving service
And engaging the works of justice.

All these are ways of prayer,
Ways to open up the holy space.
And Jesus dwells in all of them,
and remains with us there.

When we abide in him,
He comes to live in us,
And then, when we look into our own souls,
We find him there.

When we abide in him in many ways of prayer,
and he in us,
then we will be ready,
as Andrew was ready,
first to ask the question, and then
to discover the indwelling glory

and then to tell the good news.
Andrew's next story,
Remember,
Is finding the little boy
Who has the little bit of bread
That is enough to feed the world.

For Andrew, prayer was the way
From seeking to finding.
And the way from finding to showing and sharing.

And perhaps not for Andrew only.
Remember –
There is another with him.
The nameless disciple
Who was his companion on the journey of discovery –
Did that nameless person
Look like, sound like,
Move like, think like
You, me, any of us?
In that nameless person there is room –
Room for
All of us.
This is our story
If we choose.