

Third Sunday After Epiphany
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Jason S. Glombicki
January 22nd, 2017

It's been quite a week. Let's begin with a quick check-in on where you are today. If you were to sum up how you felt last week in one word, what would it be? (Think about it; then, share with a neighbor.) Well, if you asked me the same question, I'd say annoyed. It seemed like everyone and everything annoyed me. Here at the church the front doors didn't work, the copier broke, and Microsoft Word drove me absolutely bonkers with the Annual Report. And those are the most benign examples here at the church. I could give examples from my life on a personal level and political level as well. One thing after another was flat out annoying.

Now, if I had to guess Jesus's emotion in today's reading I'd also go with annoyed. Maybe it's just my week, but I do think he was annoyed, maybe even angry or perhaps simply agitated. We heard Matthew say, "Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee." He withdrew. I sometimes withdraw when things don't go as expected; you know, when I'm annoyed or agitated or even angry. You see, for Jesus, John's arrest was a moment of change. Remember, John baptized Jesus. It's likely that Jesus was a disciple of John. We don't know why John was arrested, but

possibly it was for his preaching and baptizing. Either way, I'm intrigued by Jesus's response to that moment of change.

Have you ever had a moment where something happened and it dramatically changed the trajectory of your life - maybe you met someone, noticed something, or participated in an event that transformed you forever? (Does anyone have one in mind?)

That moment of change for me was when I decided to go to seminary... reluctantly. Now, all through middle school and high school I attended church regularly, but I didn't want to go to seminary. I didn't want to be a pastor - after all they're nothing but buzzkills. Anyway, I graduated college with the intention of going to medical school. Yet, I was also exhausted from undergrad, so I took a year off and worked at a homeless shelter here in Chicago. During that year was my moment of change.

You see, shortly before graduation I finally realized that the thoughts and feelings I had were labeled by the world as being “gay.” Although, I called it “bi” back then - sexual attraction is complicated like that. Anyway, having grown up in a more conservative church, I was devastated. So, I fought it for a while, hiding in those closets I like to build. Then, one Sunday, I went to a north side church. This congregation was a wonderful place of welcome, love, and grace. They embodied what I understood of our God as they welcomed questions, celebrated diversity, advocated for justice, and were honest about the short comings of the church. Oh, and they happened to have an out gay pastor and an out, partnered lesbian pastor with kids. *That* was my moment of change. While I would wrestle with my own sexual identity for many more years, what I knew is that I felt the liberation of God’s love and grace. Although I didn’t quickly accept it, I knew I was drawn into something that recognized the need for reform within the church *and* the world; drawn to something that voiced God’s story of love and justice and acceptance. I was drawn into something that would change my life.

I wonder if that’s how Simon and Andrew felt when Jesus called. I imagine they knew this Jesus guy, but then in that moment something finally clicked. They probably didn’t understand everything that was happening but they were drawn into something. They responded to Jesus’s call, and they recognized the world’s flaws.

Two thousand years later things are still not right in the world or even in our nation. We are in an interesting place in the United States. Every four to eight years we have a presidential transition. However, this transition is different. I think few people disagree that the election cycle was divisive. I also think most experienced a moment of change. If you were a Trump supporter, I think you may have realized it first; you may have noticed that something was deeply wrong in the United States and you responded. If you voted for Hillary, you probably noticed this moment on an early Wednesday morning in November. If you didn't vote, couldn't vote, or voted for someone else you've probably observed this frustration. Many people walk around frustrated, annoyed, and agitated.

If Jesus, Peter, and Andrew have anything to say to us today, it's that we have an opportunity to respond to that agitation and annoyance. We are called to use the skills and gifts we already have to proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is near, or, in other words, we are called to let the world know that the reign of heaven is completely different than what's going on in the world. In our readings in the weeks ahead, we'll find that the reign of heaven includes naming the poor, lowly, and marginalized as blessed, we'll be encouraged to do good in the world, and we'll be challenged to be moral beyond the law. In all of that, we will remember what is key and often overlooked in today's gospel, namely that in response to Jesus's moment of change he

went to teach and heal all people. We will also remember that today Jesus called fishers to fish for people, putting their same skills into action in a new way.

So too God calls us to use our own skills and power to influence the reign of heaven in the world. God calls us to use divisive elections to agitate us into a response no matter for whom we did or didn't vote. God calls us to model the reign of heaven, like Jesus did, by teaching others about respect and by healing others with our words and actions. We are called to welcome the stranger, cloth the naked, protect the rights of others, and provide healing to all people. We are called to peel back the layers of misogyny, racism, and homophobia from the Christian tradition we inherited so that we might uncover the essence of what it means to follow Jesus.

There's much to be done to help realize the reign of heaven, regardless of who was president before or after 12pm eastern on January 20. Sure, one side of 12pm might make it easier to accomplish this in our minds, but nevertheless there is hope. There is hope that we have a God that constantly surprises us and promises to never leave us. There is hope in knowing that we can gather together with our voices to be a transformational power in the world. There is hope in knowing that we have the ability to teach and to heal like Jesus did as we share the good news of God's love, justice, and grace.

I believe deeply in the power of this moment of change. I believe it because I'm convinced that without that moment of change one Sunday morning I probably would

have been a bitter, closeted, and deeply troubled person. Now, I know what it's like to have the life-giving message of God's love and grace set me free. A moment of change can push us into action and response. You and I can respond with the joy and the privilege of working each day to clarify the true gospel of God's love and justice. We have the challenge of being called to welcome the other, no matter how annoying. Each one of us has been called by God through our moment of change to work for transformation by standing up and speaking against racism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism, cisgenderism, classism, colorism, ageism, and nativism. For this world is hurting, the world is afraid, and the world is uncertain, but we know that our God brings life, healing, and wholeness. What a gift from God, and what a calling we have to share.

So, there it is –moments of change are often things we stumble upon. Jesus was changed by John's arrest, and Peter and Andrew were changed by Jesus' call. Yet their responses to these moments of change were transformational in their teaching and healing. In our response to those moments of change we have the great gift to help create the reign of heaven. We have the joy to respond in love, to work for peace, to share this life-giving news, and to help heal the world. Thanks be to God for liberating us to respond to change. Thanks be to God for the hope found in annoyance. Amen.