

**Sermon preached at St Michael's\***

**By Caroline Litzenberger**

**(16 January 2011 – Epiphany 2A)**

*Loving God, help us to be ever mindful of your call to love one another,  
and grant us the grace and courage to work for the coming  
of your reign of love into our world.*

*Amen*

<pause>

Last week we celebrated the Baptism of Jesus,

- Using *Matthew's* account to bring us to the banks of the Jordan River
- Commemorating that *momentous* event by
  - Baptizing John Wesley and Lily Sinclair, and
  - Enrolling this year's candidates into the Catechumenal Process with all its links to baptism

<pause>

This week we consider Jesus' baptism again – but from a different angle

From the perspective of John the Baptist:

- At the beginning of today's gospel, John sees Jesus walking toward him and declares, **“Here is the Lamb of God”**
- Then, without mentioning Jesus' baptism *explicitly*, he proclaims its significance and *Jesus'* importance (with the aid of the dove – the Holy Spirit):

**I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, “He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.”**

<pause>

Jesus:

- “The Lamb of God”
  - Evoking images of the Passover
  - Symbol of Liberation
- Baptizing with the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit:

- “Companion on the Way”

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\* A portion of this sermon is inspired by a sermon for Epiphany 2A by The Rev. Dr. J. Barrington, rector of the Church of the Annunciation in Oradell, New Jersey, which is in the public domain “Sermons that Work” website of The Episcopal Church. It may be found at [http://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermons\\_that\\_work\\_126415\\_ENG\\_HTM.htm](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermons_that_work_126415_ENG_HTM.htm).

- In John's Gospel: The Paraclete
- Which can be translated as "sponsor"

The Holy Spirit:

- Our companion on the way
- Our sponsor

<pause>

Jesus:

- "The Lamb of God"
- Responding to Andrew's question, "Where are you staying?" with the words, "**Come and see**"
- Baptizing with the Holy Spirit
  - All who "**come and see**"
  - All who follow him

<pause>

"Come and see"

- What did John mean by "Lamb of God?" Come and see.
- Jesus, are you really the Messiah? Come and see.
- Why should we follow you, Jesus? Come and see.
- It is as if Jesus is saying,"
  - Why not open yourself to hearing God's call?
  - And then consider saying "Yes!"
  - As have many of you by
    - Feeding the hungry, or
    - Teaching, or
    - Building water system with El Porvenir, or
    - Serving as liturgical leaders, or ...
    - (Well, you get the idea)

<pause>

God's call:

- Isaiah said "Yes!" didn't he (but *then* he got frustrated)
- Isaiah declared, "**The LORD called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me.**"
  - He goes on: complaining that all his work on God's behalf has been "in vain"
  - But God tells him that his ministry, so far has just been much too limited: he needs to do more, much more
  - He needs to think bigger and reach farther, even "**to the end of the earth.**"

<pause>

## God's Call

Last Sunday, in her sermon, Chris, had us all stand – one group after another – as she repeated God's words,

**“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights.”**

She continued,

Each and every *one* of us has a call to be part of God's mission – but we can *only* participate in that mission to the degree that we understand that each of us is God's chosen, in whom God's *soul* delights.

- Each and every one of us is chosen by God
- And God's soul delights in *each* of us
- And each and every one of us is called by God to take part in God's work in the world
- And, as Isaiah reminds us, God called us before we were even born!
- And then when we were born anew in baptism, God called us again, as God has continued to call us over and over and over again throughout our lives

<pause>

<pause>

Jesus invites us into ministry with him with the words, “Come and see”

- Such simple words
- We are not asked to know in advance where this will lead
- We are not asked to bring anything with us but ourselves

Living into God's call is really about living into who God is creating each one of us to be

- Becoming our true selves
- Through the process of saying “Yes” and unleashing that “Yes” on the world
  - Yes, it's tough
  - Yes, it's pretty much of a blur
  - Yes, it's hard to see clearly where we're heading
  - But all the time we're discovering ourselves as we simultaneously discern God's call
  - And, we are not doing this in isolation, but rather, within our worshiping community

<pause>

<pause>

This weekend we remember Martin Luther King

- Who said “Yes” to God's call
- And whom God called to reach way beyond his own congregation, even his own community
  - In fact, emulating God's call to Isaiah, to reach **“to the end of the earth.”**

And in today's forum, we learn[ed] about Jonathan Daniels

- Whose response to God’s call was similar to Martin Luther King’s, although not as prominently so
- An Episcopal seminarian, he felt compelled to go to Selma, Alabama in 1965 in response to a televised appeal by King and a powerful call that came to him during Evensong in his seminary chapel
- There he worked for the right to vote for all citizens and there he died when he shielded a 16-year-old girl from a man with a gun

Today we are also mourning the deaths of six people killed in the assassination attempt on Arizona Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, as we pray for her and the others who were wounded but survived

- How were *they* responding to God’s call in their lives and in their actions?
- Perhaps some were responding as servants and others as prophets
- Rep. Giffords has been described by many as a prophetic voice in the House of Representatives
- Again, seemingly emulating Isaiah’s response to God’s call

<pause>

Such responses as these go beyond the level of an ordinary “Yes” to a bigger, bolder “YES!”

As individual human beings, we have only a limited vision of God and of God’s Reign: the Peace of God that passes all understanding

And what we can see is foreign to much of our own experience as individuals and as a society

- It is incomprehensible
- It threatens to turn the world *as we know it* upside down
- <pause>
- This may be a *very* good thing
- But it may *also* be frightening

And in the face of all this, we need to remember our humanity

- Remember that none of us is perfect and that we each see God’s creation through different eyes
- But that *each* of us is a beloved child of God
- Each of us
  - Those with whom we agree
  - And those with whom we differ
- And we are called to reach out in love to each and every one of God’s beloved

<pause>

<pause>

Filled with God's grace and stirred by the Holy Spirit within us, we say "Yes"

- Even as we struggle to discern the implications of our response
- And even as we learn more and more about our true selves by living into our "Yeses"
- But by looking deep within ourselves, we also gain affirmation of our response
  - By paying attention to what we *feel* deep inside ourselves while we're thinking about what we're learning
  - By *trusting our gut*

Then perhaps we can truly embrace all that God would have us be and do

And even pray as has the priest and poet, Carl Daw:<sup>†</sup>

*Gracious Spirit, give your servants  
Joy to set sin's captives free,  
Hope to heal the broken-hearted  
Peace to share love's liberty.*

*Through us bring your balm of gladness  
To the wounded and oppressed;  
Help us claim and show God's favor  
As a people called to bless.*

*Amen.*

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<sup>†</sup> From *Wonder, Love and Praise*, Hymn 782