

Year A, January 26, 2020  
3 Epiphany  
Christ Church, Mexia

Last Sunday, we heard John's account of Jesus beginning to call his disciples. Today we heard Mathew's account. And I believe that leads us to a discussion of evangelism, or our duty to call people to God through Christ.

I'd like to begin with two different quotes that I feel relate to the message today. First, Chris A. Lyons observes: "There is a subtle false teaching that says we can be evangelical without being evangelistic. It has us believe we 'go' to church rather than we 'are' the church." And secondly, one from William Temple: "The church is the only cooperative society in the world that exists for the benefit of its nonmembers." Those are both important to remember – WE ARE the church, and while we do exist for each other, we must not forget that we exist even more so for those who are unchurched or unbelievers.

Epiphany is a time when we focus on the fact that Jesus is God incarnate and a time to examine our own call, not only as individuals but as the church. We are the church and as such we are to continue Jesus' work, which is clearly delineated in the last verse of today's gospel reading, "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and sickness among the people." Thus, we, Jesus' church, should exist to help those out there, the people of Mexia and Limestone County, and beyond, who are hurting and who don't know what we know. Jesus didn't build a building and expect people to come to him on Sunday morning. Jesus went to the people, met the people, served the people.

Let me share what I believe is exciting news. The Bishop's Committee met yesterday and generally decided that the Simmon's House next door is not appropriate for our needs and the needs of the Mexia community. Therefore, we are in the process of getting bids to demolish it and considering what we should do with the land, that will serve not only our needs, but also those of our neighbors. This is part of the kind of outreach to which we are called by the scripture today and by Jesus' life in general. So, we need to discern how we can benefit our neighbors.

Now our neighbors may need some help or assistance, such as food, money, clothes, housing, a place to gather, a place to get physical needs met and/or a place to get spiritual needs met, because most likely, they need Jesus just as much, if not more, than the other things. But how will they hear about him, how will they come to know him? How will they know that there is a God out there who watches over all of us and wants a relationship with each and every one of us?

As N.T. Wright, Bishop of Durham, scholar and author, notes – Jesus’ references to the kingdom of heaven today and throughout Matthew are not references about how to go to heaven. These calls by Jesus are not about future salvation, but about contemporary action – specifically today to fish for human beings – and not just to fill the seats in this church or other churches – but to help those who are hurting – to bring some relief to their lives – and to give them the hope about which we know, at least I pray we know, and why last week I talked to you about identity. Because I think it is essential for us to remember that we and all others are children of God if we are to do ministry well. We need that identity for ourselves and for others. And sometimes people are not attracted to the Episcopal style of worship that we love so much. Therefore, sometimes we need to establish relationships in other ways.

There is a story about the Reuben Donnelly Company of Chicago. At one time they were the largest printer of magazines, and they had a huge machine to send out notices to people whose subscriptions had expired. But one day, a tiny spring in the machine broke and a rancher in Powder Bluff, CO, received 9,734 notices that his subscription to *National Geographic* had expired. He rode the 10 miles to his post office, sent his money to renew, and wrote a note to go with the payment, “Send me the magazine. I give up!” Sometimes people need to hear the message, the invitation from us, so many times before they can give up, or they need to feel God’s blessings and love so much before they can surrender. We just need to keep sharing our story, modeling Christian behavior, and telling them as Jesus did in John’s account last week, “Come and see.” Come and see for yourself.

I hope that as we continue to go through Epiphany, we will actively consider what Jesus is calling us to do as individuals and especially as a church. What kind of outreach to those out there do we need to do? And I hope that, like the disciples of old, when we hear the call of Jesus, we will respond without hesitation or reservation.

In the name of the One God - the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.

*Amen.*