

2nd Sunday After Epiphany

Jan. 15, 2023--- Rev. Dr. Kimberlynn McNabb, Prepared for ELCIC sermons by email

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days God has spoken to us by a Son. (Hebs. 1:1-2)

Greetings and peace from Kjiptuk - the Great Harbour- in Mi'kma'ki, traditional territory of the Mi'kmaq people. It is with gratitude that I, Pastor Kimber McNabb, and the people of Resurrection in Halifax, join with you and other congregations across the ELCIC to reflect on the Word.

Flip through photo albums from my husband's family and you will see picture after picture of family members on vacation pointing to the attraction they have stopped to see. I always wondered about the pointing, as if the viewer can't see the only attraction in the photo. I have concluded that the pointing had two purposes: one was for emphasis, and the other was to keep children's hands from bothering or teasing siblings or cousins.

Pointing in pictures to the main event was not invented by my husband's family. Way back in Medieval times, paintings often had figures pointing. For example, the Grunewald altar piece, has John the Baptist pointing at Jesus being crucified, as if the image of Jesus crucified doesn't already have the viewer's attention. Lucas Cranach the Elder painted the crucifixion with Luther pointing at the Word (an open Bible in his hand) while a reformer in the group beside him points to the cross and the crucified Jesus.

Go back further and we hear today's Gospel, a story of John the Baptist pointing, *Look here is the Lamb of God.*

As much as we might find pointing in photos and paintings unnecessary, the world is in desperate need of pointers; people whose mission it is to point out *the Lamb of God*. Pointers are needed for many have not heard, and those who have are occupied, preoccupied; heads are busy; hearts are heavy; people are lost in schedules and everyday responsibilities. Even the most attuned need the occasional pointer to be jolted into seeing, turning around, and waking up. Car horns, alarms, and timers were all invented because people loss focus, and get caught up not paying attention to the world around them, including where God is in the world.

As followers of Jesus and practitioners of faith, we have the skills to be pointers. *Look here is the Lamb of God*. Once upon a time, cartography maps, mapped known areas and named settlements and features; places on the edges -the unexplored or unknown- were marked with phrases like '*here be dragons.*' As people we understand this practice and readily participate in marking areas: look! here be war, here be racism, here be injustice, here be a falling apart healthcare system, here be a truck convoy, look here be wrong. Followers of Jesus and practitioners of faith get sucked into the world's pointing of fingers, forgetting that the Gospel is to point towards God, God's love, grace and mercy, and the work of the kingdom.

How many of you had to point when posing for family photos? No matter - because today we are going to take a moment to practice pointing at the main attraction. Get your pointer finger at the ready, and follow my lead. As I point to a person in the congregation, do you know what I see? Look, there be Christ! Look, there be Christ! To those of you on the other side of the video screen, look, there be Christ. Now you try it.

...

Yes, we have, *look, the Lamb of God*, in our skill set. We just identified and pointed to Christ in our midst. We can take this skill into the world. I know it will be harder to practice in the world, but you have it. You can do it. During that practice of pointing to Christ, you didn't once think about 'there be dragons,' did you? Being practitioners of faith is continually returning to simply sharing and highlighting the Gospel; pointing to God present in the world.

The letter to the Corinthians tells us: *just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you – so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gifts as your wait for the revealing of Christ. (v6)*

This is the second part of John the Baptist's *Look, the Lamb of God*. John has a more pointed practice, the practice of testimony; of telling his testimony of Christ. *I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on Jesus. I myself did not know him...."* and so on.

Now for those who are one step ahead of where the preacher is going – as I am guest in your midst, not knowing how talkative you may be, and not wanting to overly stress out the sermon deliverer – I will not ask you to turn to your pewmate and have you give testimony of Christ; an experience of Christ that you have witnessed. But consider, if I did ask you too, what would you tell?

I suspect many of you are quite relieved by not having 'to tell.' Perhaps you find yourself tongue-tied, can't think of an example, or are not so courageous.

Recently in Halifax, the church started hosting a community story circle. Each gathering of the story circle has a theme, and those gathered are invited to share a story on that theme for the rest of the group to hear. Everyone has a chance to share their story. Before we get to the main storytelling time, facilitators have found it important to do a few warm-up exercises designed to get people comfortable with each other and speaking in a group, to warm up imaginations, and practice organizing thoughts and articulating feelings. What is learned from community story circles is that: one, storytelling is difficult at first and can be uncomfortable; and two, storytelling is a skill that can be learned, practiced, and honed.

Testimony -a public recounting of a God experience, or a declaration of faith- is storytelling. Like storytelling, the ability to give testimony can be learned, practiced, and honed. Testimony is modern examples from your life experience that are the Gospel. Testimony is an additional kind of pointing – you are giving a pointed account, a pointed interpretation of an event; telling stories and talking with pointed reference and direction to God, God's love, the work of the kingdom.

A beginning practice is to reflect on that-to-which you point, *look there be Christ*, and articulate the scene in words: *Look there is Christ. That person has taught me about peace in times of difficulty.*

I've seen them pray. They have prayed for me. No matter what the person faces they radiate a divine grace and peace.

Testifying to Christ is framing what we see and experience from a Christ perspective and practicing the telling of the story in testimony style.

The sunrise this morning was beautiful. God the Creator warmed my heart through this gift. ...

I did hear about that news and my first response was a prayer, Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. The news didn't change through the day, but I did, I felt a peace and hope greater than myself and because of that was able to figure out how to address the circumstance with a doable action...

In the aftermath of Hurricane Fiona, I saw people helping each other – God's love being passed from neighbour to neighbour...

These kinds of remarks and responses are pointed. It is more than just a conversation that we are engaged in. It is pointed testimony pointing to *Look the Lamb of God*.

Today we claim the pointed text from the letter to the Corinthians: *You are not lacking in any spiritual gifts as you wait for the revealing of Christ ---*

We are not lacking the skill, the spiritual gift, of being pointers: basic pointing and pointed storytelling. Even as we wait for the revealing of Christ, we point out Christ already revealed.

As followers of Jesus and practitioners of faith, may 2023 be the year our photo albums, social media feeds, annual congregation reports; our words, actions, and lives, boldly point and testify *look, the Lamb of God. Look, there is Christ!*