

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Called By Name

Old Testament Lesson

Isaiah 43:1-7 (NRSV)

- ¹ But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.
- ² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.
- ³ For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.
- ⁴ Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you,
I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life.
- ⁵ Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you;
- ⁶ I will say to the north, "Give them up," and to the south, "Do not withhold;
bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth—
- ⁷ everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

Gospel Lesson

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 (NRSV)

¹⁵ As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶ John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

²¹ Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Bible/Sermon Focus

In the United Methodist Church we have a phrase: "The ministry of all believers." The idea behind the phrase exists among other Christian denominations in some form or another. We believe that all Christians are called to ministry, that God has put a special and unique calling on each one's heart to do and be something. And we, as Christians, are called to discern and live into that calling, that ministry in our lives. And we believe that calling is affirmed in our baptism. As Pastor Andy said this week, "everyone who is baptized, is called." That we each have an individual calling in our life points to the diversity among us. Your particular ministry should be one that builds others up through healthy relationship and action. It should feed you, and others. If you are participating in ministry and it seems to only lead to fruitless resentment, then it may be time to discern again what it is you are called to do.

In our baptism we witness to a God who knows us personally, a God who like Isaiah says, "Calls us by name." Being called by name expresses an intimacy between us and our creator. Our God meets us and knows us in our deepest suffering and our deepest joys. And in our baptism, we acknowledge that we indeed are called to respond to what God has done for us. We are called to do and be something. We are called to do our part in that relationship. And we are called to respond by living like Christ.

Living Christ-like is not always easy. You and I are not God, and we are far from perfect. Which is why we need each other; to hold each other accountable and to encourage each other. We make promises to each other and to God. We make those promises in our baptismal vows. We promise to give of our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness, that in everything God may be glorified.

This week Pastor Andy mentioned the Discipleship Promise Card that was emailed out last week. This card is to be used by each of us to discern how well we are participating in these five areas of our discipleship and to help us set new goals for growth. These cards are not meant to be turned in. They are for each of us to use to reflect personally on where God is calling us to go deeper, to take next steps, and to respond to all that God is doing in our lives and in the life.

Discussion Questions

1. When is it hard for you to live a "Christ-like life?"
2. Within the "ministry of all believers" every Christian is called to specific ministry. To what ministry has God called you?
3. How do you show up for people that you are in relationship with? How do you express devotion, care, and love?
4. What does it mean to you that God knows you intimately?
5. For some of us, reflecting on our baptismal vows in a small group setting can be helpful. If you would like to talk through your response to the reflection offered by the Discipleship Promise Card, please do so. You can find the card at www.manchesterumc.org/promise

Prayer

Holy God, who calls us by name, we want to live into the calling you have placed in our lives and in our hearts. Help us to search ourselves and to seek you in all that we do, so that we may respond to your generous love in our lives. May your grace guide us to be patient with and supportive of each other and your work in all that we and our neighbors do. Help to clarify also, where we are not called, where we need renew, and where we need a break. Amen.

"We have not shown the world another way of doing life. Christians pretty much live like everybody else, they just sprinkle a little Jesus in along the way." - Shane Claiborne