

## **Blessing Others is God's Real Call to Us**

*Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ...  
that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous work...*

Not too long ago I wasn't sure I would be able to say this: I have not just one, but two grandchildren. Terra is 4 and a half. Sagan is 2. I venture to say that I am probably a typical grandmother. I just feel all guushy about them. I think when most parents and grandparents look at their new child they can't help but look for familiarity. Who does this little baby—or child look like? Whose eyes? Whose nose? Whose ears? We watch for expressions or movements that remind us of a parent or grandparent or some other memorable relative. We want them to be safe—to grow up to be healthy, happy, well educated, responsible, and productive. We want them to have a good life.

What does God see when God looks at us? God sees God's self. Just as we see ourselves, our ancestry, in the faces of our children, God sees God's reflection in us. In human terms, God is guushy about us!

The scripture readings for last week and this week are about hearing and responding to God's call to us. In his sermon last week Fr. Rob spoke about how we do or do not respond to that call and ways to tune our hearing.

Today we heard the call to Jonah and four of Jesus's apostles; Simon also known as Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

Jonah was told (not requested) to go to the people of Nineveh with a message from God. Though very reluctant at first, he went. The message seemed to be one of cataclysmic doom, but it was meant to save the people—to get them back on the track to having the good life God meant for them to have.

Jesus told Peter, Andrew, James, and John to follow him as they, too, were going to be sent out with a message which Jesus had not yet revealed to them.

We also heard from the Apostle Paul who was called by Jesus to preach a message of salvation to the Gentiles.

The New Testament scriptures tell us that Jesus preached (and later the apostles preached) that the Good News was that the Kingdom of God had come near—that is that Jesus, while in the flesh, taught that the way to redemption and salvation (the way to have a full and happy life) is through loving God and neighbor so completely that all malice, all hatred, all greed can no longer exist and the world can be changed in a twinkling of the eye.

I think the message of Jesus was really the same message Jonah shouted about in the streets of Nineveh. It was not the actual words that Jonah said but rather what the people of Nineveh heard.

And I am daring to say that that message was actually a blessing.  
From verse 14 of the Psalm today: "...steadfast love is yours, O Lord..."

There it is. The message. God is Love. Therefore I am suggesting that what Jonah shouted was: “God loves you! Turn back and see that! God’s glory is in you because you are God’s image!”

To me this is the true message of the Good News of the Kingdom of God in Christ Jesus. As we have heard Fr. Rob say so many times in his sermons: “Jesus was born as the perfect union between the divine and the human”; to give flesh for eyes to see, ears to hear—for humanity to touch and know that God is real and is with us—that love is with us.

The message of doom and destruction becomes a message of hope and love when people hear God literally pleading with them to turn away from hatred and greed and to realize the incredible love that God has for each individual. Recognizing that we are that love, the message becomes a blessing: “You are God’s beloved child and precious in God’s eyes. God knows you and you are special.”

I am convinced that that was the real message the people of Nineveh heard and responded to because not only did they turn from the evil they were doing, but they also put on sackcloth and fasted! It was not mere lip-service to try to appease God.

Apparent doom and gloom may be looming. The Apostle Paul certainly thought there was going to be an imminent cataclysm of some sort that would change everything. But for him it was a good thing because it meant Jesus was returning. So his urgent preaching was to help people start living the life of love immediately.

In the text we read today from 1 Corinthians Paul is saying that all our encumbrances need to be stripped away—it is the affirmation that, when we see ourselves as God sees us, it is as if all the trappings of our humanness are gone. When we see ourselves without all the earthly entanglements, what is left is the true image of God in each of us as God’s beloved. We are God’s babes, mirroring that same glorious work—that we are marvelously made as the Psalmist states in Psalm 139.

The one and only true call to each of us is in our collect today:  
Give us grace O God (show us your favor), that we may answer readily  
(without trepidation or fear) the call of our Savior Jesus Christ (to share the blessing of your infinite love) and that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of God’s marvelous works.” (that each one of us is a glorious, marvelous work of God).

We cannot answer this call unless we, ourselves, know/feel that we are God’s beloved. Say it to yourself and say it often: “I am God’s beloved child; God knows me and I am marvelously made!” When you have taken in and accepted that love then you will not only be ready, but you will readily answer because you won’t be able to keep that love quiet! You just won’t!

Many of you may be familiar with the monk and theologian, Thomas Merton. The story about his goes something like this. He was on a street corner somewhere and suddenly he was overwhelmed with love. Everything around him became love. From that day on he could not contain it.

On Tuesday, January 23<sup>rd</sup>, the film called A Case for Love with the Episcopal Presiding Bishop will debut at the Regal Theater in Santa Maria as well as other parts of the country. If you

do not already have your plans to attend I encourage to join many of us from Saint Barnabas. In it I am sure we will learn more about how love is the call; love is the answer that will change the world.

How we bless others with the message of love is as individual as each of us—as Paul tells us many times in his letters. Some of us will bless the children of God through work with the homeless. Some will work with the mentally challenged. Some will bless through working with children. Some will bless with a compassionate ear for the grieving or troubled heart. Some will champion human rights. Some will write letters to the lonely or incarcerated. Some will knit. Some will devote time to food banks or thrift stores. Some will bless through ordained ministry.

Reflecting God’s love back into the world by these and many other actions is how we bless ourselves also..

Once we leave the beauty of our worship space and the comfort and companionship of our church we will be in the company of the wider human cohort.

I hope that the next time you are in the grocery line, or at the park, or even driving your car, that you will remember and that you will see the image of God in all the glorious creation that surrounds you. And when you come face to face with someone in whom God’s image seems dull and hard to see, I hope you will remember to look closer with the eyes of your heart, just as you look at your children to find the resemblance of a familiar family member. Look lovingly and see God’s image in their face and bless that person in your heart and even aloud if possible saying, “You are blessed because you are a beloved child of God in whose image is light and love and you are marvelously made!”