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AMDG

Epiphany 3A - January 22, 2017

Well, today's Gospel should sound familiar. We just heard it seven weeks ago when we celebrated the Feast of St. Andrew. And, the theme is pretty familiar as well, because last week the Gospel message was also about call, John's version of Jesus calling Andrew and Peter.

So, you might think, haven't we heard enough about call already. Yes, we know Jesus calls us. We get it. Even I felt like this was overkill.

When I was trying to figure out how to speak to this, yet again, I was mired in my own feelings of tiredness and anger. Then it hit me - "that's where I'm at right now - tired and angry, and that's where God is calling me from - that place, right where I'm angry and weary."

So, what I'd like us to think about today is an aspect of call that we may not consider often enough - that God calls us ordinary people out of our ordinary cares and preoccupations into extraordinary relationship, and the extraordinary power of God's love. And that extraordinary relationship begins with direct, honest, communication with the Divine inside me. In the psalm today, it says, You speak in my heart and say, "Seek my face." Your face, Lord, will I seek.

Yes, God calls us to be his Christ in the world, to extend God's eternal Kingdom of compassion and justice throughout all Creation. And that compassion and justice cannot be extended, if it is not first perceived - in here. The Kingdom of God within. And, therein lies the rub - where is that heavenly kingdom of compassion inside me? Sometimes it can seem so far off.

Aristotle must have had this in mind, when centuries before Jesus he said, "All friendly feelings we have towards others are extensions of friendly feelings we have for ourselves." And recently I read an interview with the Dalai Lama in which he said, "In order to have compassion for others, you must have compassion for yourself." He went on to say, "Self-compassion is not self-pity, self-absorption or self-indulgence. The more compassionate thing we can do for ourselves may be to not eat the whole bag of Fritos" Instead, he explains, self-compassion is the "instinctive ability to be kind and considerate to

yourself.” Hmm... Being kind and considerate to self. And doesn't kindness and consideration begin with listening - Listening to that inner voice, honoring where you really are in the moment? You can't access the true self without honestly accepting yourself wherever you might be, which is exactly where God is waiting to meet you. Do you imagine that God does not know how you really feel, that God is not there with you? God is with us always in all ways. But, honestly communicating with God about where we are and how we are can be so difficult. Especially when we're so used to burying our feelings under the mask we like to show the world. Honest communication with ourselves and God means giving voice to feelings of despair, sadness, anger, fear, confusion. We do so much to hide those feelings, but when we do, we also hide the true self. And, in hiding the true self, we shut ourselves from God's healing power, and then are unable to extend that power of God's compassion and justice in the world. If we cannot honestly and resolutely face the darkness in ourselves, then how can we honestly and resolutely address the darkness in the world?

God wants so much to heal us and relieve us of what we keep hidden. And, I've found that I don't even have to ask for healing sometimes. When I have enough willingness to be present to what's really going on and to say, "I'm hurt God, I'm angry. I'm afraid." I barely am able to give voice to those feelings when I immediately feel God's presence, and I know I will be OK. Is this not authentic prayer? true healing? Have you not experienced this before?

However, I don't always have the willingness to be present or to give voice to my feelings and share them with God. What then? I can still be honest. I can say, "God, buzz off. I'm comfortably numb. I don't want to talk to you right now. I'd rather watch TV, play solitaire, have another glass of wine, another piece of cheesecake, or just lose myself in a book. But, I definitely don't want to talk to you!" I've also been surprised to find, that when I even express my unwillingness to talk to God or to let go of my pride, not long after, my willfulness begins to slip away and I find just enough willingness to pray. It's really that easy. And it begins with honesty. God does not call us into a life that is too hard or too onerous. God calls us out of our sadness, anger, loneliness, and worry into a healing relationship with the Christ. "Come to me all of you who

are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” The self-compassion that I speak of, that I believe the Dalai Lama and all the great spiritual stars of the world speak of, is the compassion that knows when to let go and reach out for God.

Again, I think it bears repeating that when I speak of self-compassion I’m not talking about the sort of self-involved, self-esteem drivel that’s found on many self-help shelves. Self-help, is just that - focused on the self. And God does not call us to some elevated self-hood, to be mini-Gods, but rather God calls the true self that is part of the Christ, formed in each of us from the foundation of the world. And that Divine Self, that is truly the Glory of God, can only be accessed when we honestly confront what is really happening in our lives, when we let God move us past the layers of shame, anger, guilt, and fear. And, it is when we allow God to unlock that divine compassion that is the Christ in each of us, that it ripples out in ever-increasing waves of compassion into the world. And that is truly God’s intention for us; it is how God builds the eternal Kingdom. We were created to manifest God's love in the world.

God is with us always. And continually calls us in our ordinary lives into extraordinary relationship. Peter and Andrew, James and John were just ordinary guys, going about their ordinary chores. So, it is with each of us. It may be while washing dishes, or working at the computer, or while driving down I-19 that you hear the Holy One within you. Jesus may call to you through the distress of loved one or your own distress, or the hungry plea of a stranger, or the anguish of a refugee you see on television. It is then that you are at a tipping point, between your own comfortable numbness, and the eternal kingdom. I pray that we each may have just enough presence to be lifted out of our ordinary lives to hear the extraordinarily call and answer, "yes, here I am Lord - scared me, angry me, sad me, confused me, worried me, hungry me, lonely me, ...here I am. Show me your face.