

Sunday, January 16, 2011
Second Sunday after Epiphany / Lectionary 2

Isaiah 49:1–7
Psalm 40:1–11
1 Corinthians 1:1–9
John 1:29–42
Year A

I.N.I.

Our rituals are the necessarily slow ways of becoming ourselves, becoming this people. They are like a home for us, a place where we find out how to be us. –Gabe Huck, *How Can I Keep from Singing? Thoughts about the liturgy for Musicians* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, © 1989, p 26)

I sometimes wonder how I got here. Not so much as pastor of Bethesda, or moving my family to Hamden, but as someone who places great value in being part of a church at all, who really and truly loves liturgy and the gathered community of the baptized. My family history could have easily had me ending up in a train wreck, because of the weight of my father's mantle, the cloak of his pastoral genetics.

I grew up knowing that my father was the fifth generation of Missouri Synod Lutheran pastors, father-to-son. You could say in the language of *Star Wars* “in those Keyl children, the **force** is strong” referring to my older brother or me, or even my older sister (whom our family wondered if she might break the gender barrier in the Missouri Synod). You might say there was a gravitational pull toward ordained ministry that was just too big to deny. But for the first twenty or so years of my life part of my inclination was to do everything I could to cross off “pastor” from list of what I would be when I grew up. The pressure was just too much to bear. The monkey on my back was jumping up and down, and in the words of just about everyone who knew my lineage, the monkey was asking “are you going to be a pastor just like your father,” which was absolutely the wrong question to ask, like lighting a match in a dark room full of dynamite.

I recently re-met an old family friend at Bethesda's “Amahl and the Night Visitors” production in December. This man was so close to my family when we lived in Groton that he was always over for dinner at special occasions. He remembered borrowing our family's station wagon to fit a bunch of kids on a youth group outing, and lending my dad his Porsche 911 (my dad got to drive his Porsche!). When he saw me at the Amahl production, he quickly said “you were definitely not the one predicted to be pastor, because you were kind of wild, do you remember?”

And the answer is yes, I do remember. And now that I'm here, both as pastor of the church and one who actually kind of revels in being part of the church, now engaged in the walk of faith with you, I credit my mother. She is the one who marched her three children down the aisle to the front pew week after week. She is the one who took the hymnal I was holding at six years old, and turned it right side up for me, who lined her fingers over the words of “Open Now the

Gates of Beauty” and thumbed through the liturgy either on page 5 or 15. My mother is the one who captured my attention as someone who practiced what my father preached, giving herself over to servant activity and in it bearing grace that made her more than a farmer’s daughter, more than a pastor’s wife, that revealed the Christ in her through her baptism.

And then more memories cascade down, of George Bowers, who showed me the ropes of the tenor section while I was yet an awkward teenager. George, a father, George, a commuter to New York, George a golden-throated singer who sang of God’s mercies and then welcomed me to sit with him and discover how to make music in a church choir, the adult choir. There was Liddy Fosbinder, the wealthy and elegant, cleaning up after communion, Mike Nagel, who invited me to play on the church softball team, and Roberta Keller, who invited me to sing for a youth musical production.

These were not people who regularly concerned themselves with the doctrine of the Trinity. These were not people who were well-schooled in the history of the Reformation. They were influential in their invitation for me to “Come and See.” Their lives and their lives as Christ’s disciples were something that they were willing to share, happy to share, and monkey on my back notwithstanding I am so grateful for them.

Into the stream of life, God’s life, the life that lasts, the community of the beloved, into discipleship with Jesus, grafted into the Trinity, we will welcome Greta Mary Lee today. Greta Mary will be initiated into through baptism, with generous water, slathered with oil, given the Spirit through the laying on of hands, joining the journey of faith.

It is not something to take lightly, this ritual, or the attending commitments that her parents, her sponsors, and her congregation make. It is a big deal, bigger perhaps than we can ever know or comprehend in this moment of time.

The servant spoken about in Isaiah is a mixed bag. She is claimed by God when in her mother’s womb. Her apparent ability to give voice to God’s ways shapes her mother like a sharp weapon. God says she will be an ambassador for glory. This servant, which is both one and many, both singular and plural, doesn’t recognize the call to shine. Like the overwhelming news of violence and hatred in the shooting in Tucson, like evidence that the church is diminished by lack of participation or lack of leadership, like any kind of hand-wringing that you yourself may demonstrate given the realities of life’s hardships, the divided nation in which we live, wars run amuck, the servant is ready to throw in the towel.

And God says, to Israel, to servants of God everywhere, your vision is too narrow. All you can think about is that your history will bring about failure, because it’s been tried before, you’ve repaired the wayward Israelites before, you’ve baptized children before, we are a nation that is polarized.

To that God says your destiny and identity is so much bigger than you think, your purposes are global, your actions, your witness, your being part of Greta’s life, your dedication to nonviolence and the restoration of peace, speaking and acting with civility will speak volumes.

What we do in our being the church, in inviting others to “Come and See,” in showing interest in

someone that we meet, in committing ourselves to the baptismal life, is huge.

We are not here in this assembly simply because we came alone or read it in a book. We are here because of our mothers and fathers, the George Bowers and Liddy Fosbinders and Mike Nagels of our lives.

In the gospel from John today, John the Baptists presents the baptized and acclaimed Jesus, heaped with fantastic words *Lamb of God, one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, Son of God*. Andrew and Peter, formerly John's disciples look at Jesus. I mean, they look at him. And then the conversation ensues. Jesus says "what are you looking for?" They say "where are you staying?" Jesus says "Come and see." It's not theologically rich. It's not a verbal sparring which we see when Jesus and the woman at the well go through. It's not a healing story or a miracle story. It's simply that Jesus invited relationship. Jesus stayed. The disciples stayed. In the conversation, in the encounter, in the coming and seeing it dawned on Andrew that there was something there that was bigger, someone who deserved the accolades that John spouted about, who was worth walking with and wondering about and seeing, really seeing.

People at Bethesda. Pay attention to this baptism. Allow ritual as it engages visual and tactile encounter to say that this water, this oil, this laying on of hands, this song of welcome allows us to see Jesus, connects the Trinity to Greta, brands the cross on her forehead forever.

Renew your commitment to enacting the gospel and to live justly. Honor words and actions that plant a course for God to shape and reshape nations. Embrace visions and dreams like those of Martin Luther King where people are honored not by than the color of their skin, or what we might see only on the surface and judge to be deficient, but the content of the their character, being children of God.

Greta Mary, we are so glad you are baptized today. We invite you to come and see and ask Christ to remain with you.

I.N.I.