

Who is this Jesus and what is his purpose? The Gospel of Luke lays it out clearly for us: he is bringing good news to the poor, sight to the blind, freedom to captives and to proclaim the year of God's favor. This peasant tradesman in a backwater location within a great Empire has changed and is changing the world. Jesus is from an unlikely location, born into an unlikely family under clouded circumstances, and as impossible and imponderable as it must have sounded to that first century congregation, *this* man is the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel.

Our season of Epiphany is meant to show us just who this Jesus of Nazareth is - and if you come back next week, well next week is a show stopper, let me leave it at that. Let me just tease you and say that all will be revealed next week. So in the person of Jesus we know once again that God is doing something marvelous for His beloved people in ways that we do not expect and would not have predicted. While Epiphany does show us who Jesus is, it also shows us how we the church are meant to be, both corporately and as individuals.

All of today's readings are meant to be provocative in some way and they are instructive as to how we are to behave. They are meant to provoke us enough to prompt a response. The response is meant to lead us into

action, and likely the actions will lead us to improbable places and to unlikely people.

In Jeremiah we learn of a man who clearly hears God's call and yet doesn't feel up to the task. God says "never mind that, I've known you since you were in your mother's womb," meaning, "before your mother and father had any hopes or dreams for you, before you had any capabilities or knowledge, I thoroughly knew you and have a mission for you, should you chose to accept it. Whether you have capabilities or knowledge or technical ability is beside the point, it is through the Lord your God that you will be equipped to do what I have asked you to do." It's an invitation that is hard to refuse!

Like Jeremiah, we too might feel ill equipped and unprepared to live out the Christian vocation. However, make no mistake, each of us, from the moment of our baptism, have been invited to live out the Christian vocation, a calling to follow and emulate Jesus, a calling that invites into relationship with God and our fellow humans in a particular way. Having been called into the Christian life, as each of us here has been, we are likely to discover that it isn't easy, that it eludes mastery, and we may not have any special skills or gifts that innately make us prepared for the task.

Fear not, God doesn't expect that or demand it. Lean on God and you will find yourself living into this particular vocation.

Certainly our Psalmist knows what it is like to lean on God. This psalm is a perfect expression for a post blizzard community. Even with a just a foot of snow, we found ourselves trapped by it. It may have made us realize how dependent we are on others just to get from point A to point B, and further realize how disappointing and lacking the efforts of these faceless others proved to be. God however, well, God is constant: a rock of refuge, the source of hope. Notice too, that the Psalmist refers over and over again to "my God," suggesting a level of intimacy between the creator and the created. We can depend upon God. [If you came to our later service, I would be inviting you to] Listen carefully to today's foot stomping, hand clapping anthem. [You would hear] {You'll hear} repeatedly words to the effect: "He's never failed me." As part of God's adopted people, we are invited into this relationship and reminded that from even before birth, we have God as our foundation.

Speaking of blizzards, I found that the severe weather brings out the worst and the best in people. One of my neighbors, bent on getting his car free from its tomb of snow, shovelled it all onto the car in the next parking

spot. Really? Can anyone really be that thoughtless and selfish?

Apparently so. This selfish act brought out several neighbors to dig out the unfortunate victim.

It was able to witness or hear about more of the best of people in adverse circumstances. Those who participate in the WARM program found themselves sheltering in place from Thursday evening until Monday morning. From Thursday morning until Sunday morning, Immaculate Conception hosted them. From Sunday morning until Monday morning, we did. Sunday morning was somewhat chaotic, receiving guests at the same time as the equipment and supplies showed up. Yet with many willing hands despite the impediment of snow, our guests were more than adequately cared for. Our guests were also in good humor despite being in close quarters with more than 20 other people for days. All this was love in action. This is the type of love in action that St. Paul envisioned when he was writing 1 Cor Chapter 13.

As one of the most familiar pieces from Scripture, we often hear Paul's passage read at weddings. If we keep it confined to just that occasion, however, we lose much of the power of this message. You see, the church in Corinth was divided and members were at odds with one

another. Everything that Paul cited as “love is not” was exactly what the church in Corinth was. And everything that “love is,” the church in Corinth was not. By which I mean to say that the members of the church in Corinth were showing envy, were boastful, arrogant, rude, insistent on my way or the highway, irritable and resentful. Imagine how this was received as this behavior was pointed out to them.

Paul was urging his congregation to be love in action. Differences are to be expected and they are merely differences, not less than, not more than, simply differences. Embrace the differences by being patient and kind. Through the differences love will bear all things, believe all things, hope all things and endure all things. Unity, not uniformity, is maintained through love.

This kind of love requires conscious, hard work. It is not a love that we just have. It is developed and achieved only with God’s help. I saw 1 Corinthians 13 in action last Sunday. I saw great love and devotion to the other and I saw joy in its provision. I suspect that such dedication was cultivated and God enabled. There may be some who acted out of a sense of obligation, that this is what we as Christians do. A mantra that I often invoke is “fake it until you make it” or act “as if” and before long I find myself

succeeding and I'm no longer faking it and am instead in that sweet spot, that place of joy. Living the Christian vocation takes hard work and discipline if we are serious about it.

Sometimes love in the manner that St. Paul spells out means telling hard truths. And receiving hard truths takes courage and an open mind, showing the same kind of love in return. We know that God acts in history, does unlikely things with improbable people, disrupting the status quo. We also know that no one is outside of God's saving embrace and that we can rely upon God. Our challenge as a community might be having the courage to figure out how we might move into greater love as St. Paul envisions it, in the things we do really well, such as our outreach ministry and in our music. How might we do more to help the homeless? How might we enhance our worship further with our music? Is there a way to merge these two ministries to create something wholly new? I don't know. What I do know is that since they are improbable and unlikely, God just might help us make it happen!

Like it or not, we are being pushed by circumstances to figure out a new way of being "church" and exploring that way forward with St. George's. We are 21st Century pioneers, if not prophets, showing the rest

of the diocese a way forward. With the Holy Spirit's help, we are going to bearers of the bright light of Christ. It isn't going to be easy, it promises to be a lot of hard work, and will likely introduce some unwelcome changes. It will be uncomfortable. And it will be the Lord working in and through us. Working on our vocation as Christians, we'll try to put aside irritability and resentment, and live into patience and kindness, waiting to see where the Holy Spirit take us next.

AMEN.