

### 3 Epiphany A

Isaiah 9:1-4

Psalms 27:1, 4-9

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Matthew 4:12-23

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Sing: I Love to Tell the Story (ELW 661, v 1)

*I love to tell the story of unseen things above  
of Jesus and his glory, of Jesus and his love  
I love to tell the story, because I know it's true  
it satisfies my longings as nothing else would do  
I love to tell the story 'twill be my theme in glory  
to tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love.*

Grace and peace to you from Jesus who loves us.

How easy it is to join together in an old familiar hymn such as that. I know I would've received a completely different response from you were I to have asked for a volunteer to come up and sing a solo. Even if you knew the words by heart already, there are 100 other reasons why you would not want to come forward to sing on your own. And I can hardly blame you.

The simple act of singing together is a good analogy for Christian community at its best. When you are not sure of the words, someone else carries that moment. Each of us has a unique voice and blended together the sound is beautiful and rich. Have you ever been too choked up to sing? When we are in deep grief or pain and cannot raise our voice, those around us sing for us. There is no panel of judges, no golden buzzer, because all are welcome, all belong.

Song has a powerful way of drawing us together and uniting us. I remember my very first day of studies at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon, the senior class (of which Pr. Rita was a part!) pulled the piano out of the sanctuary and into the foyer and gathered all the new and returning students to sing together as they welcomed us to the seminary. Song led to conversation, conversation to learning names, knowing names became classroom conversations then friendships. That simple welcome planted seeds of unity among us for the years of study and community ahead – very fruitful seeds indeed.

This is the work of ministry to which we have all been called. In the waters of baptism we are caught into the net of God's family, but soon realize that we too are entrusted with the invitation and welcome of others. And while at times we

may have fun with it, sing together and share potlucks, at times It is also difficult work.

For example, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians is a letter from Paul to the church at Corinth. He wrote to them, because they were tearing one another apart with immaterial debates. Even though baptism was a rite of inclusion, welcome and unity – the people had began to shape a hierarchy founded on who baptized whom. Some claimed they had more authority and importance over others, because of who baptized them. And we know too, that many other debates arose in the early church, from circumcision to the welcome of Gentiles, attitudes on slavery, sharing of resources and more. Paul repeatedly taught and wrote letters to communities of faith saying, there ought to be *“no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.”*

That mindset and purpose is, as we sung together, telling God's story. It is looking after those who are oppressed, those for whom life hasn't been kind. Our purpose is to change the world through invitation rather than force or coercion. We share together the abundance God gifted to us, so that all may have enough.

Yet, we too are sometimes challenged with differing opinions or objectives or even hopes for the future. Sometimes in our hearts we wonder who is pulling their weight and who is not. At times we are fearful for ourselves and families as we listen to the news and cope with rising costs and prevalent violence. We look for ways to protect ourselves. Yet, the more we become insulated from one another, the more alone we become.

Jesus knew this tendency, and so he taught James and John, Peter and Andrew a new way of life, a new way that built upon the skills and gifts they had, but now to be employed in serving a new cause. They would build God's family. Those first Apostles made a gamble – they took a risk - not knowing what would come for them. They didn't receive riches or fast cars or upgrade their homes, but they did find a way of life in which they had a purpose, they had something to contribute and new friends to do it with. Following Jesus gave their life deep and broad relevancy.

As God's family today, as each of us contribute as we are able, the joy for what God has and is doing among us becomes infectious. And when we are divided (this happens) we turn to God, placing our trust in the One who gathers us. And I know, that (trusting God) can be difficult too. When we are facing uneasy times (which we might admit is the story of the whole church today) it's tough to not doubt or have questions. It's tempting to try to solve our problems by our own means.

Yet at every crossroad, every doubt, every temptation God is with us. This morning as we heard Jesus declare “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near” we hear an offer of a new beginning – *again*. Repent means to let go of our old ways and worries. Repent means to return to the foundation of faith, to God's promises. “Repent!” is a call to gather together in a common purpose as one people that God's love may be shared.

As we continue in the Love your Church campaign we are on a journey, not just of building financial resources, but of discipleship, of strengthening God's family in this house. As we remember the foundations laid from our Charter Members to our newest ones held in arms, we learn that following Jesus is not about ourselves, but about the whole family of God.

*Loving your church* really is about loving the *people*, as quirky and different and beautiful as each of us are. Loving your church is loving God who first called us and continues to do so. As I close today, I'd like for you to turn to your neighbour and really look them in the eye, take a good look, a loving look and say to them, “I am so glad you are here.”

Thanks be to God!