

08 January 2023: The 1st Sunday after Epiphany: The Baptism of Our Lord—Isaiah 42:1-9

Jesus' Baptism begins his public ministry. We have just begun a new year. Not all beginnings are momentous. A new calendar year is rather humdrum; at least when you reach my age! Other beginnings are more crucial.

In the Scriptures, decisive beginnings are indicated by a Greek word: Kairos—it means a time of special significance, crucial importance. There is another Greek word for time: chronos, as in chronology. Chronos-time is one minute, one day, one year succeeding another. Kairos is time pregnant with meaning, with possibility. This is the word Jesus uses in his first public utterance: *The time (Kairos) is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near* (Mark 1:15)

Three things distinguish Kairos-time. First there is always a 'call' with Kairos-time. God calls and we respond. The personal qualities of those called is not the deciding factor. Assuming oneself unqualified for a ministry can be a convenient excuse for inactivity. If you ask, "What can I do, given my interests and abilities?" the options are limited. If you ask, "How is God calling me to minister?", there are wide possibilities. God calls. We do not choose a ministry; we choose to respond.

The Second point: God calls people in Kairos-time for conversion. This is an overlooked aspect of Church leadership, which isn't surprising in a utilitarian culture. In the Church, the bottom line is not product, profit, or prestige. Our bottom line is in our mission statement, proclaimed on the front of the bulletin: *We strive together to put Christ's love into action through inclusive and engaged worship, study, and service.* Our mission is fulfilled to the extent that our minds, hearts, and lives are changed by God into the mind, heart, and life of Jesus. Our ministry—corporate and individual—grows as we are more deeply converted, which God accomplishes. God calls us to minister, because it is the context in which God converts us more deeply. Scripture testifies to this: most of the people God calls in the Bible are average at best, unlikely candidates at least; a few are boneheads. God called them, not because they were the best candidates from our point of view, but because God saw in them the raw material in which the miracle of conversion happens. God called them, converted them—often through years of struggle—and they in turn became instruments for others' conversions. God calls you, too: your continued conversion is an obvious miracle of God's grace. If God can change people like you and me, there is hope for everyone. God calls all his children to ministry for conversion, our own and others'.

Finally, our most important witness is not in making right decisions, but our example. Ministers, clergy and laity, incarnate God's will; that is, we are the 'in the flesh' desires of God for our parish, our community, the world. A right decision here, or a wrong decision there, is not of utmost importance. How we live, interact, and commit ourselves is the testimony to our real values and influences the life of the entire parish and the community in which we live. The deep responsibility of ministry is not to make right decisions, that's the easy part; the real call is to live, with God's constant help, in such ways that others will see God's love in action through us. We heard about incarnate leadership in the prophet Isaiah: *...I have put my spirit upon him...to bring forth justice....He will not cry out or lift up his voice...a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench...I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness...taken you by the hand and kept you...given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out...those who sit in darkness...See the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare....*

These words describe the servant Jesus, and his followers. To be 'in Christ' is to desire to be as Christ is. Being 'in Christ' is known through our desire to be in relationship with those around us, as Christ is in relationship to all creation.

These ministry realities for us all are a way of life to which God calls everyone in the Church, a way of life to be learned and lived each day. We are always beginning again—this is Kairos-time. Blessed and honor, thanksgiving, and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive be yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, now and for ever. Amen.