

**“The Nature of Jesus’ Call”**  
**3 EPIPHANY – YEAR A – January 23, 2005**  
**Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close**

I want to thank you for coming out this morning, despite all the snow! When I was growing up in Syracuse, New York, this was a typical snowfall. But it’s a challenge for us here in the Philadelphia area. I’m reminded of the passage from Isaiah, “Though your sins be like scarlet, I will make them as white as the snow!” Rejoice with the snow today! We’ve been cleansed!

Most of you know I have a love for movies. The next best thing I enjoy are the comics! When I get my papers, I usually read the comics first. I want some humor before I read the depressing news on the front page. I particularly like “BC”, “Calvin & Hobbes”, and “Doonesbury.” But another one of my favorites was “Peanuts.” I have found that the comics can be theologically profound.

One such cartoon starts with Lucy seated at her 5-cent psychology booth (Pulpit Resource, January, 2005). Charlie Brown has stopped by for advice about life. “Life is like a deck chair, Charlie,” she says. “On the cruise ship of life, some people place their deck chair at the rear of the ship so they can see where they’ve been. Others place their deck chair at the front of the ship so they can see where they are going.” The good “doctor” looks at her puzzled client. She asks, “Which way is your deck chair facing?” Without hesitating, Charlie glumly replies, “I can’t even get my deck chair unfolded.” I can identify with Charlie.

Many people will say that we in the church are on a journey (sort of like a ship cruise). They come here looking for something. They are engaged in a search. Some are looking for the meaning of life. Others are trying to discover their identity. Others will say they are seeking God. There is a problem with this. We’ve got it backwards. It’s not us who are searching for God, it’s God who is searching for us! God reaches out to us in a powerful way in Jesus Christ.

We can go to the Gospel this morning and begin to understand how God searches for us. In Matthew, we continue the story of Jesus’ baptism and the beginning of his ministry. Notice what happens. Jesus goes after Simon and Peter, James and John and calls them to follow him. Jesus doesn’t sit back and wait for people to come to him. He reaches out and calls people to come and follow. It was not the practice of rabbis in Jesus’ day to do this. Most rabbis let the importance of their teaching attract followers.

Jesus has a different way of doing things. He reflects the way God acts. God is one who relentlessly searches for us. This is not some distant and aloof God. This is a divinity that comes after us! The Bible is not a story about our searching for God. It’s a story about God’s searching for us! I think we tend to run away from God. We don’t want to be found! Think about the stories, especially in Luke’s Gospel, about the Lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. These stories are about a God who seeks us out and rejoices when God finds us!

We seem more concerned with the searching in our life than with the final destination. Dr. William Willimon comments that he sees people jumping from one thing to another in some mad search for something, but finding nothing. We are looking for something, but have we overlooked that we may have found it? Willimon talks about his youth in the Methodist Church. In the 1970’s, he was part of the evangelism effort that came up with the bumper stickers that said, “I found it!” Do you remember those bumper stickers? I do. They suddenly appeared everywhere. We started wondering what they had found.

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Dr. Willimon said that the bumper stickers were meant to be a way for people to enter into a discussion. They would tell people that the “it” they had found was Jesus! I don’t know how successful they were. I remember other bumper stickers popping up after the first ones appeared: “I never lost it.” “I wasn’t looking for it anyways.” I don’t think the effort attracted the attention they wanted. People don’t seem inclined to want to find it, especially if “it” is God!

The searching still seems better than the finding. Dr. Willimon was at Duke University. He talks about an advertisement of a speaker who was going to talk about a semester studying Zen Buddhism. He went as well and found 200 students in attendance! That was wonderful! A couple of weeks later he saw a similar notice of another speaker who this time was going to speak about a semester spent in a Benedictine monastery. When Dr. Willimon got there, he found the same 200 students! We are seekers, but what have we found that we will stick with?

Just how do we get found by God? Let’s go back to Matthew for a moment. I have always been fascinated by the response of the disciples. Jesus comes and calls them ... and they leave everything IMMEDIATELY and follow him! They leave their jobs, their families ... everything. To be found with God calls for the same kind of immediate response. We have to let go ... of attitudes, of possessions, of certain relationships. For some of us, this will be bad news, but we have to remember what Jesus will give us back!

We have to create a new attitude in Church. It’s not about us looking for something. It’s about God finding us ... and now we’re called to respond. When Jesus calls the disciples, we are seeing how God searches us out, finds us, and says, “come follow me.” Perhaps we can start changing the way we look at things by learning to pay attention to how God is in our lives.

One of the things we can do is understand the nature of “coincidences.” Have you ever have someone come into your thoughts and you contact them ... only to find out they needed something or were thinking of you? This past week, I kept thinking about a former parishioner, Lucy. She was ordained to the priesthood just a little over a year ago (I had the privilege of preaching at her ordination). After a couple of days, I gave her a call. “Oh!” Lucy said, “I’ve been thinking about you!” I don’t call these coincidences ... I call them “God incidences.” I believe God puts people and places, events and things in our lives to get our attention. It’s one of the ways that God finds us! God goes about disclosing the divine self to us over and over. Jesus is that self-disclosure. Pay attention!

The calling of the disciples is about being found by God. Simon, Andrew and the others weren’t looking for Jesus. He found them. He called them, and they entered into a new state of being found! Jesus wants us to be part of what God is doing. Like the disciples, we will have to let go of some things. God is looking for us. Do we want to be found? When we are found, what do we do next? Stay tuned!