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Epiphany 3 A
Grace and Holy Trinity Church

Andrew and Simon are called by Jesus. Simon is renamed and both of them transition from fishermen to fishers of men.

Each of us also have been called by Jesus and while some have been renamed, all are asked to transition to become fishers of people.

This week we witnessed the final stage of a transition of the presidency with the inauguration of Donald Trump as our 45th president. No one can deny that this nomination and election as well as the vetting of his cabinet has been a time of division within the nation. Cries of fear and doubt and concern as well as affirmation celebration and hope are coming from the mouths of fellow Americans. And as this week unfolded I found myself thinking about the nature of the often repeated refrain of "God Bless America". What do we mean when we talk about blessing a nation? Do we expect God to transform America? To change the path that we are on as if America were an individual. If that is the expectation I think it is unrealistic.

To my mind America in the height of her division isn't much different than the members of the Corinthian church who in today's Epistle reading each claim allegiance to the person who baptized them. Americans all too often claim identity based upon affiliation and I wonder how many of us view Christianity the same way.

In my personal experience- there was certainly a time in my life when I was a member of a church, but not a member of The Church, a time when although I was a member of a congregation but not an active participant of The Body of Christ. As our Presiding Bishop Curry often explains it we are the Episcopal Branch of The Jesus Movement but it took me a long time to understand that being part of a congregation or even a denomination did not mean that I was truly was part of the Church as a whole. My understanding of life in the Church was shaped by a somewhat transient life when I was a child I lived in 4 states in 5 years. Church was part of that life, first St James' in Aston, PA , then The Church of the Transfiguration in Derry New Hampshire, St. Peter's by the sea Narragansett RI, and St. Albans Sinking Spring, PA. In all these places I served on the altar, sang in the choir, or sat in the pews. Looking back I was affiliated with each of those congregations- but never really belonged. I was there on Sunday for worship and Thursday for choir and other days as necessary. I showed up. That's what it means to be an affiliated Christian to me - to be in worship most weeks and say I was a member of whichever of those aforementioned parishes was "home" at the time.

I remember the day I was confirmed at the age of 16 in The Episcopal Church, at St Albans' where I attended with my mother and sisters. That day when the Bishop laid hands upon me, in front of my mother, my agnostic father, my Lutheran Nanny and my Roman Catholic grandparents. I remember expecting that my confirmation would be a watershed moment, I would feel different, I would have a better sense of who I was, and what God expected of me. At the time I also had two cousins who were confirmed in the Roman Catholic Church, and I was incredibly jealous of them because they got to choose a new name at confirmation, Laura chose

Maria and Brian, Francis. I thought that might be the key to the kingdom the being renamed was some kind of magic formula. That in being newly named they became like Simon- Peter they were given more responsibility than little old me who just stayed Kim. Because despite my high expectations after my confirmation not much changed, I was still me. I remained affiliated with one place, one liturgical role or another, one pew.

About a decade later I understood that membership in the church is much larger than belonging to a single congregation or one affiliation when I began to explore and question my vocation and calling in a greater sphere of influence than a parish alone. It was when I expanded my faith to my school, my place of work, my interactions with friends and strangers, that I began to understand what it means to BE the Church, to become fishers of people.

My grandfather, the competitive fisherman, will be the first to tell you, as he told my ordaining bishop the day that I became a deacon, that I shouldn't be a priest because I can't catch a fish to save my life. But I what I can do is fish for people. I have done this for as long as I can remember. For me what fishing for people looks like has changed very little since I became a minister in The Church at my baptism, but my sphere of influence has certainly grown. As a child of God, fishing for people, is based in forming transformational relationships. It can be as simple as holding someone's hand when they need to be comforted. Providing a hot meal on a cold day. Giving a shoulder to cry on. Sitting in silence when silence is all that will do. Despite Tobacco Jack's joke, fishing for people isn't about bait and hooks, reels, rods or lines. It's about being present to those who are in need as your authentic self. It's being a companion on the journey as a family member, friend, colleague or a stranger. It's inviting someone to pray with you. It's accepting the prayers of those who ask faithfully what they can do. It's standing face to face with those who curse and persecute and revile you and engaging them in non-violent compassionate acts of radical love. Showing others how to fish for people is the greatest way to expand our spheres of influence to shift from being affiliated with a Church to being a Christian .

Jesus calls each of us to come to the vocation of ministry and calls each of us by name into this most sacred journey during which we follow Him. We follow Jesus when calls each of us into a relationship first with Him and then with one another. It is in this twofold relationship with God incarnate and God's incarnate creation through that we are transformed and we are capable of initiating transformation.

Consider for a moment your own life, the people who we come in contact with day in and day out, those we live with, those we work with, those we socialize with- all the people we are affiliated with. Take a moment and make a mental list of all the people you have seen, spoken to or communicated with today.

How has following Jesus influenced those interactions? Did they embody service, or comfort, witness, or protection? Are you Christ-like in your relationships with others? I'm willing to bet that you like me can say this honestly

Some days I am a rock star fisherwoman. Other days I come up short. But I recognize that I am called by Jesus to always follow Him again, all the way to the cross and grave and resurrection and when that journey becomes too much, when I start trying to follow someone

else, or something else, when I focus too much on a secondary relationship He calls to me again and says. Being a Christian is not an affiliation, it is not part of who you are, it is ALL of who you are. Jesus tells us as disciples to not be afraid, "You are my child. You are called to love and serve the Lord as I have loved you. Upon you I build my Church." It's not just these walls, it's not just these people, it's not just this city or this commonwealth or this nation, it's all baptized people who are blessed and called by name to become Fishers of people. It's all that we are and all that we have and all that we do that allows the Love of God to transform the world around us.

This is how God blesses America, the world and all creation by calling each of us to follow him.
Amen