

Today I would like to open with a prayer using the lyrics from the song, Speak O Lord... Let us pray... Speak, O Lord, as we come to You, to receive the food of Your Holy Word. Take Your truth, plant it deep in us, shape and fashion us in Your likeness. That the light of Christ might be seen today, in our acts of love and our deeds of faith. Speak, O Lord, and fulfill in us, all Your purposes for Your glory... Amen.

Last year I found myself at a 4-H chili dinner...

Which is a strange place for me to be, since... I'm a vegetarian...

And I brought my husband... who doesn't eat food with onions or peppers in it... So, chili was out for him too... And we brought our niece who also happens to be a vegetarian....

So, there we were 3 non-chili eaters at a chili dinner and raffle... Why you might ask?

Because I was asked to go, by some of St. John's amazing 4-H kids... To come and support their club...

And when we arrived the place was packed, and all the tables were full... I was amazed by the turnout and the community support... Plus, I was told by many people, that the chili was awesome...

But what really captured my attention was the energy, care, and love that radiated from that space. And I would not have experienced it, if I were not asked to come and see what this fundraiser was all about...

Which is the invitation we get from our gospel today...

Philip tells his friend Nathaniel about this amazing guy from Nazareth, to which Nathaniel responds, can anything good really come out of Nazareth?

Which might be similar to a vegetarian saying, can anything good really come out of a chili dinner?

And the answer for both... Is to come and see...

Because the gospel today is on the calling of the disciples... And our Old Testament reading was on the calling of Samuel....

Both call stories are clear calls, coming from the voice of God... Which is great for Samuel, Nathaniel, and Phillip... But what about the rest of us?

There is no literal phone call from heaven... There is no clear voice of God coming in the night... Unless you have been blessed with that kind of call...

Instead, our calls happen continuously throughout our lives... Mostly in subtle ways, and maybe just maybe, in some not-so-subtle ways...

Our call stories are deeply personal. They happen while we make our way through life, and they emerge as we pray, live, and be...

They are evolving, and they change as we live... Which can be exciting at times, or scary at times, or even sad at times, especially when change is devastating and unexpected.

But that is life... Life evolves and transforms... and newness is always being birthed in our midst and made manifest in our hearts.

Which is what this season after epiphany is meant to remind us of.

The manifestation of the word made flesh... And what that looks like to us now.

Which is something we can discover together as we come together... As we come and see what God is doing...

By coming here, even on this very cold winter morning, or by tuning in online... When we are together, the goodness of God's love is tangible...

Because this time together is a deep and personal invitation from God. It is more than a church service; it is a time to encounter the living God.

Which is why attending church, or watching online, is a requirement for all our confirmation students.

As this is a fruitful space that allows for the workings and the stirrings of the Holy Spirit.

A time to open your heart and see where God might be nudging you...

Maybe it is to fill out a time and talent form? Or by joining the adult study or the book club? Maybe to help with Sunday School or join the lovely quilters?

Or perhaps the Holy Spirit is revealing to you a new ministry that is needed here...

The possibilities are endless...

For example, next month Lent starts... We will have mid-week Lenten services with a dinner beforehand... So, we will need volunteers to help cook, serve, and clean...

And as wonderful as St. John's ministries are, I know there is more going on in your lives...

You have responsibilities and obligations... And you also deserve time for respite, leisure, and fun.

Which is why our call stories are so deeply personal... They are carried in your heart as you embark on each day and in everything you do... You don't take a break from who God called you to be...

Instead, you live your call, the best you can and modify it along the way... Especially when the Spirit speaks.

You try new things, return to old things, or keep doing your thing, by living out God's love through who you are.

Because good ministry starts with you... In the time and the spaces, you cultivate with God. By opening yourself to receive God's never-ending invitation of relationship... By dwelling in God's word and in prayer. By spending time together in worship and in fellowship.

And I know it is not always easy to get up on a Sunday morning and make your way to church... And you don't need to come every single Sunday...

But the invitation is always there... To come and see...

Because what happens when you come and see, is such a beautiful thing. You get to know each other, relationships blossom, and we get to experience God together...

This is a time to fill your cup, by receiving the living God through the body and blood of Christ.

This is a time to be reminded that you are not alone... Not only is God always with you, but you have this community to carry you through life. To know you and see you. Where you are held in the hearts and prayers of others...

Which is what we do every Sunday... We pray for all the people of St. John and those who pass through our doors...

This is where we come together, to see God's goodness, love, and grace lived out...

So that we can be sent out... To share God's goodness, love, and grace.

So, the light of Christ might be seen today, in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.

Let us pray like we started, using the last verse of Speak O Lord... Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds, help us grasp the heights of Your plans for us. Truths unchanged from the dawn of time, that will echo down through eternity. And by grace, we'll stand on Your promises, and by faith, we'll walk as You walk with us. Speak, O Lord, 'til Your church is built, and the earth is filled with Your glory... Amen.