

**Sermon for 2 Epiphany, Year A – January 19, 2020**  
**Church of Reconciliation, San Antonio**  
**The Rev. Judith L. Rhodes**

***Hearing Our Names Called: Lord Make Us Servants and Instruments of Your Peace***

As I mentioned in last Sunday's sermon, the prophet Isaiah holds a cherished place in my heart and therefore, in my spiritual journey. This week's text is one to really take to heart, to cherish, and to trust, most especially if you are anything like me, you have at one time or another, believed something about yourself that limits, or diminishes your identity as a Beloved of God.

As I was praying and reflecting on these verses, I had this almost outer body experience which we name memory. In a flash there I saw myself, in a navy blue uniform dress, a white butterfly collar blouse, navy blue knee socks and black tie shoes. I knew I was on the playground of St. John the Evangelist elementary school. I saw myself standing parallel in a long line of other children facing another long line of children. And then I heard these words, "Red rover, red rover send Kevin right over." And I guess it was Kevin who went skipping across to the other side. This chant was repeated so many times back and forth, one side to the other, and there I stood, waiting to hear my name called. Truth be told, I don't know if my name was ever called in the context of Red Rover. I seem to think that if my name was called, it was probably, dead last.

All these years later, as I stand here as a 67 year old woman, I remember that experience. I can still recall not only the deep disappointment, the hurt, the "shame" of being the last called if not the one left out entirely, I can also remember how in other similar situations and experiences of my life, I believed more about myself based on being chosen or not, name called or not, invited or included, or not. How easily we can slip very early on in our lives, into a mindset or in truth, a "heartset" where we take the hurtful, messages about ourselves and believe what we think they have to say about us.

I distinctly remember that on the playground over those very early years of my life, I began to believe that I was never worthy of being on any team, or engaged in any kind of team sport or activity. According to my experience of not hearing my name called, I would never be fast enough, strong enough, good enough to hear my name called. End of story. Move on, Judith.

I did, however, notice that when there was an academic assignment, some other youth (who wouldn't necessarily give me the time of day) would call my name to join their team. It didn't take me long at all to abandon any hope of playing on a team, or hearing my name called. What I did begin to take to heart was if there was any thing worthy about me, it was comprised by "the neck up." Stay in your lane, Judith. And so it seemed safe for me to determine my worthiness, my talents to reside, from the neck up, period end of story.

Does any of my story resonate with your story? How did you or do you still believe only what you see, or hear around you, and not the deeper, Divinely-given truth of your identity... your Belovedness, your worthiness before your Creator?

Today we hear in this text from the prophet Isaiah these awesome words:

***The Lord called me before I was born, while in my mother's womb he named me.***

What?? And this is not the only time we hear a similar message... In Jeremiah 1:5 we hear these words:

***Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.***

Or from Psalm 139, we hear these words:

***For you yourself created my inmost parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I will thank you because I am marvelously made... Your eyes beheld my limbs, yet unfinished in the womb, all of them were written in your book...***

And from our own Book of Common Prayer, in Eucharistic Prayer B, we hear these words:

***For in these last days you sent him to be incarnate from the Virgin Mary, to be the Savior and Redeemer of the world. In him you delivered us from evil, and made us worthy to stand before you...***

A lesson from Isaiah today is that our Belovedness, our worthiness, our very own sense of belonging is **only** to be rooted and grounded in the Divine, the One who knew us, formed us and named us before we drew our first earthly breath!

The Gospel moves us into the story of John, Jesus, and the disciples. We hear a bit more from John directly here about his resistance to baptizing Jesus, and his conviction and obedience to do just what Jesus commanded him. And we hear John's own profession of faith: "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" words he could not contain to himself. Upon hearing John's confession, we are told that two others heard this profession and followed Jesus.

In an exchange, we learn that Jesus himself asks, "What are you looking for?" A great question for each of us to ponder. And without answering the question directly, they ask Jesus where he is staying. And Jesus replies, "Come and see." And they do. They go and spend time at the feet of the Teacher, the Rabbi, the Messiah, the Anointed.

Notice also that Andrew informs his brother, Simon, that "We have found the Messiah." And that because of Andrew's invitation, Simon comes to Jesus, too, and receives a new name, Cephus, translated, Peter.

My friends, in each of these Scriptures there is much for us to take to heart, to struggle with, and to believe:

*Your name has already been called. You are known and loved by God from before you drew your first breath.*

*Your name continues to be called, moment by moment as the Beloved you are, not in spite of who you are but because of who you are.*

*You and I receive many messages about who we are perceived to be, what gifts we have been given, and more painfully, perhaps, what gifts others and ourselves believe we lack.*

*Your life and mine have purpose. We have already been given as a light... as a witness to God's salvation that is intended to reach the end of the earth.*

*You and I are invited to believe that each of us has uniquely been gifted by our Creator to do the big and the small, the seemingly insignificant gestures that proclaim the inclusive love of the Divine for all. You and I have been chosen for this mission.*

*And then, you and I are invited to come and see. To be with Jesus in spirit and in truth. To hear him call us by name and send us forth as witnesses and evangelists of his Love for all.*

This is a time when we honor the prophet, Martin Luther King, Jr. Like the prophet Isaiah who described landscapes transformed as well as the hearts and lives of all God's Beloveds, King did the same. He spoke of that unquenchable hope and an unabashed seeking after justice and peace:

*I have a dream today... I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low. The rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together. This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back with... with this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood, of the human family. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together... knowing that we will be all be free one day.*

Bishop Eugene Sutton, Diocesan Bishop of the Diocese of Maryland once wrote:

*I do not believe that Martin's dream died with him on that fateful day. Killing the prophets of God has never silenced the message of justice, compassion and peace. The question before us today then is what will we do with this dream, this Divinely given vision of reconciliation, peace, and justice for all? Perhaps we will offer prayers **of confession** for our continued inability as a church and as a nation to realize God's vision ... **of thanksgiving**, for the progress that our church and our nation has made in the years since Martin's death... And **of commitment** to the labor that is still ours to grow this vision by our actions on behalf of all God's Beloveds. ...*

Just like John and Andrew in the gospel today, just like Martin, it may be your invitation to another person by which they will come to know Jesus. It may be by your one, seemingly insignificant offer to share your story of faith, that another will discover theirs. And along with this faith, find a new resolve for a peaceable kin-dom to arise.

So let us return to the beginning... whatever your story is, like mine of Red Rover, our names **are** called, time and time again by the One who formed us, knew us, and named us before we drew our first breath. In truth, that's all that matters. In our life of faith, **it's all that will ever matter**. So then, let us listen to the words of God's prophets and let us step out in the faith and love of Jesus as instruments of God's justice, God's peace, God's love... for all...

***Thus, hearing our names called we pray: Lord, make us servants and instruments of your peace... Amen.***