

Sermon – Hollis Holder Galgano, Deacon In Training
Trinity St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, New Rochelle, NY
January 25, 2009

The Third Sunday After The Epiphany, Year B:
The Parish Patronal Feast of St. Paul &
The Sunday of the Annual Parish Meeting

Scripture

Jewish Scripture: Jonah 3: 1-5, 10

Psalm 62: 6-14

Christian Scripture: Acts 9: 1 -19

Gospel: Mark 1: 14-20

Hymns

Entrance Procession: *Rouen* (#360, *The Hymnal 1982*)

Sequence Hymn: *Munich* (#255, *The Hymnal 1982*)

Offertory Hymn: *Abbot’s Leigh* (#780, *Wonder, Love & Praise*)

Post Communion Hymn: *Ghana Folk Song* (#74, *Lift Every Voice & Sing II*)

Retiring Procession: *Blaenhafren* (#610, *The Hymnal 1982*)

The Leaflet Art: In this Parish we celebrate the serendipity of having the Sunday on which we and many Episcopal Parishes hold our Annual Meeting (the last in January), coincide each year with the Sunday closest to the Feast of our Patron Saint (The Conversion of St. Paul, January 25th). This gives us a day that doubly emphasizes our identity as a parish community. Our cover today celebrates dimensions of our identity by bringing together two photographs. We see our Welcome sign and open door inviting people in to worship with us. We enter through the door, and by the magic of the camera, turn to the left. We look towards the Sanctuary and the Procession coming out to greet us. We aim to be a welcoming community that worships God “in the beauty of holiness.” (Psalm 29:2b) Photographs by Francis Logan. Print by Kay Gould.

Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Saviour Jesus Christ. May I speak and may you listen. In Christ's name, Amen.

There's a story I'd like to tell you about an Episcopalian woman traveling across the country, who would stop each week at a different Episcopal church to worship.

Her first stop was at a church in San Diego, where she encountered something rather odd: A golden phone in the Narthex with a sign saying, "3 minutes for \$10,000." She was rather puzzled, and after the service she inquired of the Rector, "What is that golden phone, and why does it cost \$10,000?" The rector replied, "Well, you know, it's a direct line to God." "Oh," she said, "I'll remember that. Maybe I can raise \$10,000 someday." The woman continued across the country, where, next, in San Antonio, she found the same golden phone and the same message, *Three Minutes/Ten Thousand Dollars*. Then at the St. Louis Cathedral--same phone, same sign. Finally she found herself all the way across the county in New Rochelle, and of course, chose to worship at the historic, Trinity St. Paul's Church. There, in the narthex was the golden phone, only above this phone the sign said *Three Minutes -- Fifty Cents*. Well, she thought, "That can't be right!" So after the service, and a wonderful coffee hour where she was welcomed and feted better than at any other church along the way, she found Father Gahler and asked whether she could have a moment with him. She explained about her travels throughout the country and the Golden Phone with the \$10,000 price tag every where else. "Why," she asked, "Does your Golden Phone only cost Fifty Cents?" "Well, said Father Gahler. "You see... here, at Trinity St Paul's a direct call to God is a Local Call."

In the Gospel today, four fisherman, Simon, Andrew, James and John, encountered Jesus at the very beginning of his ministry in Galilee, where he was proclaiming "the nearness of the kingdom of

God. Jesus was saying to them, God is present here and now, God is *indeed* is Local.

And, In each of our readings today, we have examples of God's Local Call to God's servants. To Jonah, we hear "Get up and go to Ninevah." Also To Saul, after his blinding encounter with the risen Christ, "Get up and enter the city." And to the fisherman in Galilee, a simple call, Follow me.

In all the readings today, God's call is to action. God calls us not just to believe and to have faith, but to act. Faith, they say, Is a Verb.

Jesus promises his naive disciples that he will make them "Fishers of People." Might this mean they, like we when receiving God's call, would become workers who are involved in forming a wider community, casting out nets of kindness and concern into the world, no longer catching just things physical, but rather reaching out to souls in need of nurture?

Did we not hear not a similar call this week in the inspiring words of President Barack Obama's Inaugural Address? He called for hard work and a common purpose. He called for a new spirit of service, and for a "willingness to find something greater than ourselves." "For kindness, selflessness, for the willingness to nurture a child...These things," he said, "will determine our fate."

President Obama's clarion call to citizens around the world to join together and to work hard, echoes the call of Jesus to his disciples in Galilee. Fishing, as we know, is not easy work. It requires a lot of muscle and endurance.

Rarely in our lifetimes have we had a chance to come close to the emotions that the disciples must have felt upon encountering Christ. Their hearts were softened and they knew that his was no

ordinary person. They were so inspired that they dropped their nets, left their homes, families and livelihoods and followed. Paul stopped persecuting Christians and gave the remainder of his life in service to building the Church.

We had a glimpse last Tuesday of such a profound encounter, as President Obama's call to action touched and inspired millions of hearts around the world.

Already his call to serve in our local communities has had a noticeable effect. On Monday, here at Trinity St. Paul's, on the day he called for community service, fifty people appeared to serve lunches at our Brown Bag program. Fifty, rather than the usual handful at most. Our nets have been spread wide, and the spirit of generosity is catching. Reports abound throughout our county of young people being inspired for the first time in their lives to serve in their communities. Even Starbucks is offering a free cup of coffee in exchange for 5 hours of community service.

Today, on the day of our Annual Meeting, we will consider ways in which we can further affect people's lives. How is it that we come to know the Nearness of God's Kingdom here at Trinity St. Paul's? How can we build community and serve one another selflessly and serve a common purpose?

Recently I read an account of a town in Pennsylvania called Roseto. It was founded by stone makers from Roseto, Italy who immigrated to the US at the end of the nineteenth century in search of a better life. As word got out back in their home town of work in the Pennsylvania slate quarries, more men came, a dozen or so every year. They built homes in the rocky hillside, and, over time, as more and more Rosetians arrived, they established a village, roughly modeled on their hometown in Italy. They built a church in the center of town, and named it after their beloved church back home. It became the center of the village and all of its activities.

The citizens cleared the land, planted gardens, raised livestock, put in schools, a park, a cemetery. Small shops and bakeries sprung up. The little town, surrounded by neighboring German, Welsh and English immigrant communities, thrived abundantly. Roseto would probably have remained in obscurity had it not been discovered by a physician named Stewart Wolf. One summer in the 1950's, while traveling on vacation in Pennsylvania, he happened to find himself in Roseto. He was struck by a remark the local family doctor made to him, that in his experience, he rarely found anyone from Roseto under the age of 65 with heart disease. How could this be, Wolf wondered? This was during the time of epidemic heart disease, before the advent of cholesterol lowering drugs. Heart disease was the leading cause of death for men under the age of 65. Why not in Roseto, unlike the neighboring villages? Not only no heart disease, but no suicide, alcoholism, drug addiction and very little crime. People only died of old age in Roseto. Wolf set about find answers, and after extensive research, he published his findings. The medical community was extremely skeptical. The citizen's good health, he determined, had nothing to do with genetics, nutrition, or location. Wolf realized it had everything to do with Roseto itself and the sense of community it provided its citizens. He noted that people visited one another in each other's homes, shared food from their gardens, took time to stop and chat on their streets, and offered the elder generation respect. They worshiped together in one place. Those who had more, took care of those who had less. The medical community was confounded by Wolf's findings, yet later convinced. They just were not used to thinking about health in terms of community.

How is it that we foster a healthy sense of community in this parish? Studies show that parishes that grow and thrive have two things in common: they practice hospitality and they eat together. Well, on the day where Father Gahler will read his State of the Union, I mean *Parish* address, I suggest that Trinity St. Paul's is healthy, for you eat very well here, and you indeed show welcome.

Just as the lady traveling across the country discovered, I too have found God lives here, in the warmth and care you show one another.

As you listen to Father Gahler's address, ask your selves where you might lend a hand. Where do you perceive a need you could fill? How might we deepen the sense of community among one another? How might we, in the words of our new President, develop a "willingness to find meaning in something greater than ourselves?" In the silence of our hearts, let us listen for Christ's call to Follow and to cast our nets into new waters. In doing so, we will find and experience here at Trinity St. Paul's, a new Nearness and Presence of our Lord. God indeed is with us. For God, at Trinity St. Paul's, is a local God.

Notes: Reference to Roseto, Pennsylvania from Outliers by Malcolm Gladwell; story of Golden Phone from archives at All Saints' Church, Harrison, New York