

January 17, 2020 2nd Sunday after Epiphany
Jack Dant and Pastor Jen Nagel
University Lutheran Church of Hope

1 Samuel 3:1-10 (11-20)
Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18, 1 Corinthians 6:12-20
John 1:43-51

**Note our adapted structure this morning. Jack is painting along the way.
Jen's words are in bold (and interspersed through service), Jack's are in non bold type.**

During the Welcome-Jen does usual welcome and offers some context for the day.

Jack Dant and I are teaming up for the preaching this morning, indeed preaching, proclaiming the gospel in word and in action.

During the prelude you could see Jack beginning a piece of art.

Through the service you'll see more of this piece emerging.

Jack and I will take some times along the way to reflect together about this process of creation, paying attention,

and how the gospel speaks into this space of creating and living out God's call.

For a portion of the service we'll have the screen shared so that you can see Jack's canvas come to life alongside the liturgy.

Thank you, Jack, for taking the risk to team up this morning.

Setting the Stage-Jack and Jen, interacting, painting featured

I've been excited, Jack, about this morning:

curious about what you'd create and how we could talk together,

hopeful about how this could move us all in a time

so filled with words, with anxiety,

so laden with worry.

So let's start by looking at your painting.

You began already in the prelude.

Lots has taken shape.

Can you tell us about your process? What have you done here?

Once I determine what I'm going to paint,

(and today I'm painting a scene of where my Mom grew up in Iowa),

I start with a drawing in paint.

It allows me to warm up with the paint brush.

And it gets me right into painting.

Then I move on to the underpainting,

where I establish shapes and the relative value of elements.

We find that shadows get lighter and bluer as they go off in the distance.

This underpainting is simply done with blue, black and white.

I also freeze the shadows.

That's a really important thing.

When you are doing a painting on location over the course of two or three hours,
the sun moves a lot and if you don't capture the location of the shadows,
they'll move quite a bit by the time you're done.

So once all those things are locked in, you'll find you can really read it, understand it,
without any color being added.
Then when you bring color into it...
The next thing I'll be doing is putting in the underpainting that I just talked about....

**Wow, I love seeing your process.
And am understanding a bit more what you are doing, and why.**

**I've been musing about the ways we experience the gospel, and really preaching.
Sure, for preaching we usually use our voices.
But I'm thinking about other ways we proclaim God's love,
this movement from death to life,
with our actions, in image, in creating, in sound and music, with a paint brush!
I'm curious, as a painter, how that strikes you...**

I love that we have a God of creation
and that we are made with the drive and abilities to create, as well.
It seems that God delights to see us grow and use our gifts in ways that lift up the world.
I don't think it's a stretch to say that we can experience God's proclamation by appreciating
and celebrating the beauty of God's creation.

**Folks may be wondering what we've got planned today - messing with the usual good
order!**

**We have three readings this morning.
Through all of them, Jack, you'll be painting.**

**Bruce will read the first lesson from Samuel, the call of young Samuel.
Zach will offer an extended musical setting of Psalm 139,
O Lord, you have searched me out, you have known me.
We'll take that time to dwell in the psalmist's cry and in your painting.
And then we'll hear the gospel,
and you and I can do a bit more preaching together using our words and
reflections,
and also your painting.
Let's move forward. Bruce, will you read the lesson for us?**

Homily

Would you pray with me?

**May the *words* of our lips
and the *meditations* of our hearts
and the *images* in our mind and hand
be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**

Grace and peace to you, beloved of Christ Jesus.

**Jack, when you and I first began talking about this gospel,
reading the gospel, musing about today,
you instinctively started with that language of wondering and noticing.
I love that you use that structure to dig in.
So what did you notice? What did you wonder?**

I noticed that they were on a journey together.
I wonder *where* they are journeying to.

I noticed that this journey brought about the calling of Nathanael.
And I noticed that he was surprised by this calling.
I wonder *how* that all played out.

I noticed that Jesus paid attention to Nathanael and that made a difference to Nathanael.

**Okay, so we've got some themes emerging:
That sense of a journey.
The sense of vocation and calling.
And that notion of paying attention.
Let's get into each of these.**

Jack, can you share more about how you see the journey in today's readings?

Nathanael was going about his daily life on a journey somewhere with his friends.
We're all doing this everyday.
It's good to see that God relates to us in everyday moments, common, daily, occurrences.
We never really know where our journey will take us.
In a sense Nathanael was curious.
He was open,
probably because he trusted his friend,
even though he was a little cynical about it,
and surely had questions,
He didn't decline the opportunity to meet Jesus.

So what does this have to do with painting?

Painting itself is a journey of learning, of discovery, of seeing.
Early in the journey there can be fear, because of what we're just learning,
and as we learn more we become more confident and able to explore new directions.

This journey is made much richer, more valuable, as we journey with friends.
In our story, Nathanael and Phillip and the others were on this journey together.
I've certainly benefited from journeying with close friends in my life..

Another element you noticed was calling, what we refer to as vocation.

Let's talk about this a bit.

That story of Samuel that we heard is a classic for calling.

Samuel can't figure out where that voice is coming from.

Is it his mentor Eli?

**And thankfully Eli realizes what might be happening and
helps Samuel listen to, and then respond to God.**

There's also a sense of calling in the Psalm, God calling us, knowing us, claiming us.

**And of course, there is that calling in the Gospel
for Nathanael but for the other disciples.**

We all have different things we're drawn toward, or called to: different gifts.
Some are the things with which we make a living, and some are not. Some are directly related
to faith, and some only indirectly.
In my world, I've felt a calling to both art and science.

Say more about that.

In my day job, I do product development of medical devices.

Like what kind of devices?

In the past, I designed spinal implants and instruments,
and now I'm developing guide wires and catheters,
devices for interventional procedures.

What do you enjoy about that work?

It's a continual challenge to find new solutions to medical needs
and ensure that they are safe and effective.

It's very rewarding to know that my work is helping people.

I love this. Thanks, Jack.

What about your other calling, your calling to art?

I've always enjoyed things artistic and started painting about 15 years ago.

I find that it feeds me,
and that it's a passion of mine, it's on my mind a lot.

I truly enjoy the journey of learning, the community of painters,
and the beauty of the whole process.

That's good, thanks, Jack.

**The one other thing you noticed in today's gospel, something I've missed in other reads,
is how carefully Jesus *pays attention* to Nathanael, under the fig tree!
I loved that you claimed that.**

I like this idea of paying attention a lot, it's rich,
it's impactful for the story
and it's such an important part of painting.

To me, this is the biggest tie in between painting and this lesson.

If Jesus hadn't taken notice of Nathanael under the fig tree (that's a cool detail),

he probably wouldn't have ever gotten Nathanael's attention in the way he did.

It was the fact that Jesus really noticed Nathanael that caught Nathanael off guard.

He was impressed that Jesus saw him, knew him,

and it made all the difference to Nathanael that he did.

God gives us the ability to see more deeply:

to see the potential in other people,

to see the beauty in what surrounds us.... if only we pay attention.

And this is so true for painting.

There are so many details to notice - shapes, proportion, relative value, subtle color variations.

The better we can pay attention to, and care about, the subject we are painting,

the better we're able to communicate our experience to another,

and be present to another person.

And I suppose also to be present to God.

This is something I love about painting on location:

it's that I'm experiencing this with all of my senses.

And if I'm successful, I'll communicate this in my painting - more than just what it looks like.

I'll communicate the feeling of the day,

the sense of air, the quiet, the moisture, all those things.

At the end Jesus says I will show you far greater things than these.

Jesus shows us how to love, by paying attention to each other,

caring for one another,

connecting in this really deep, whole bodied, attentive way.

You know that line where Jesus says, I saw you under the fig tree...

I wonder if Jesus was saying here: there is more to seeing than just looking, glancing.

Like he's seeing into a person.

**You know, from what I'm hearing and experiencing with you today, Jack,
painting takes us to that deeper level, seeing, really seeing.**

**You and I talked a lot in our preparation about how to make
this experience today (in words or in images) a sermon.
In preaching I watch for law that convicts us, and also grace that redeems us.
When we're seen, really seen, in these deep ways, both can happen.**

**Our failings, our sin, it's present, and we can be real with another person, real with God.
There's a freedom in this.**

Like in a painting, when we need to start anew, we have the freedom wipe it out, to try again.

**And in this, even in the pain and messiness,
that's right where Jesus meets us again.
Where Jesus sees us with love, with acceptance, with forgiveness.
Where Jesus meets us in grace.**

**These days are so intense, Jack.
The politics, the uncertainty, the threats of violence, the glimmers of hope on the
horizon. I find comfort and encouragement in what you've shared:
In that sense of journey, and meeting others and Jesus on the journey.
In that trust in being called, and the new ways that God is still (even now) calling us.
In that attentive posture toward details, that God sees and notices, and that we can too,**

Jesus teaches us to pay attention to the uncommon in the common,
to pay attention to our surroundings,
and to pay attention to, and care for, each other.

**Thank you, Jack, for sharing with us your gifts in painting,
but also for sharing your spirit,
your sense of God working in you and through you.**

Thank you.

I've enjoyed being a part of this sermon and sharing my world of painting, and my faith.

**Beloved Community, may your hearts be open to God's calling.
May you notice the beauty in the world and the people around you.
May God go with you on this journey. Amen.**