

*Isaiah 49:1-7*  
*John 1:35-42*

*word count: 1,822*

We may count ourselves as creatures such as Andrew and Simon Peter, people searching for meaning while working at the tasks at which we are employed. ...Listening for the calling that we believe even now continues to come to us; named and destined, as we are to live out the full expression of our humanity.

Jesus' calling to his ministry began on the day he walked down to the Jordan to be baptized. He was greeted by John and others with words that suggested that in him great things were expected. He was asked where he might be found, and he said, "Come and see," and so he began to collect people to him.

The fisherman Andrew may have sensed that he was in the presence of that which was authentic, and went to tell his brother Simon Peter, bringing him to meet Jesus. Perhaps they may have been familiar with the words of the prophet Isaiah who said, "The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me." Or it may have been that they felt, as we all do at some time or other, that we have destinies to fulfill, that the journeys therein unmask our weaknesses as we go on the way, and call us to change and be better than we have been.

The journey for which they left their nets by the shores of Galilee would test them at every turn. In the difficulty of answering a call to follow the best that can be, and like them on some scale, I suppose, at times, we too, walk in the shadows—the reflections of ourselves that do not show us at our best, and if we gain the modesty to recognize these faults and to forgive ourselves, we also learn how to forgive others along the journey as well.

The events of the past week have exposed us at both our best and worst.

This week, President Obama comforted a nation and a community in grief with the right tone, calling us to recommit to a more civil public discourse as he delivered a eulogy that asked us to talk with each other "in a way that heals, not in a way that wounds."

Before a nation knew the motivation behind what looked like an assassination attempt on a member of the House of Representatives, as well as the senseless shooting of people exercising their right to meet with their representative, questions hung in the air. While some more shrill politically motivated speculations were made, the urge to find blame was tempered more than one might have expected in the climate we are in, but what became clear is that we as Americans no longer know how to talk with each other outside of the circles in which we are comfortable.

Obama told the 14,000 people at the huge McKale Center, and those of us watching in our homes: "Rather than pointing fingers or assigning blame, let us use this occasion to expand our moral imaginations, to listen to each other more carefully, to sharpen our instincts for empathy, and remind ourselves of all the ways our hopes and dreams are bound together,"

The president did not ascribe a political motive to the alleged shooter, or suggest that either party was to blame. Rather, he sought to move the nation past the tragedy.

We saw ourselves at our best in moments like these, as well as in a very singular occurrence whereby the extraordinary emerged from the ordinary. A man named Eric Fuller was shot in the knee last week by Jared Laughner. A news van at the Laughner home caught this man pulling himself up out of his car and limping to the home because he felt he needed to come there to forgive them. He knew the parents were suffering. "I know it sounds crazy," he said, "but I'm here to

forgive them, and possibly their son.” His modesty, his sincerity, and even his own surprise at his actions were all evident.

We also saw ourselves at our worst—the instinct to politicize the acts of a madman was hanging in the air on all sides, and thank goodness cooler heads, for the most part, prevailed. But it opened up our national psyche and forced us to take a hard look.

Writing in the *New York Times*, David Brooks did as good a job as anyone I have read so far in analyzing what was found there. He said,

“The problem is that over the past 40 years or so we have gone from a culture that reminds people of their own limitations to a culture that encourages people to think highly of themselves.

“But over the past few decades, people have lost a sense of their own sinfulness. Children are raised amid a chorus of applause. Politics has become less about institutional restraint and more about giving voters whatever they want at that second. Joe DiMaggio didn’t ostentatiously admire his own home runs, but now athletes routinely celebrate themselves as part of the self-branding process.

“So, of course, you get narcissists who believe they or members of their party possess direct access to the truth. Of course you get people who prefer monologue to dialogue. Of course you get people who detest politics because it frustrates their ability to get 100 percent of what they want. Of course you get people who gravitate toward the like-minded and loathe their political opponents. They feel no need for balance and correction.

“Beneath all the other things that have contributed to polarization and the loss of civility, the most important is this: The roots of modesty have been carved away.”<sup>1</sup>

In a famous passage, Reinhold Niebuhr put it best: “Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore, we must be saved by hope. ... Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore, we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint. Therefore, we must be saved by the final form of love, which is forgiveness.”

“Life is an adventure in forgiveness,” declares writer and editor Norman Cousins. This spiritual practice is manifested in our relationship to the Source of Peace, in our perception of self, and in our dealings with others.

“If you want to see the brave, look at those who can forgive,” we read in the Hindu sacred poem, *The Bhagavad-Gita*. “If you want to see the heroic, look at those who can love in return for hatred.”

Jesus, clearly a brave man, prays while hanging on the cross of death, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Love of enemies is a crucial part of Indian freedom fighter Mahatma Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violence. And, calling on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose birthday we celebrate this weekend, “Forgiveness is not an occasional act; it is a permanent attitude.” “We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. One who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love.”

“When you forgive somebody who has wronged you, you’re spared the dismal corrosion of bitterness and wounded pride,” Frederick Buechner writes. “For both parties, forgiveness means the freedom again to be at peace inside their own skins and to be glad in each other’s presence.”

Andrew and Simon Peter, in choosing to follow Jesus that day, found themselves confronted with the command to love and to forgive, even when it ran counter to who they were. Peter in particular, would expose his anger and his cowardice. And still, it may have been that they felt, as we all do at some time or other, that we have destinies to fulfill, that the journeys therein

unmask our weaknesses as we go on the way, and call us to change and be better than we have been.

A reader of Carl Jung knows what the “shadow self” is. Perhaps the thing we have in common on either side of the wide American political gulf these days is a recognition of the shadow in the other that we so dislike in ourselves, whatever that might be; though David Brooks has rather harshly named it as a lack of modesty, and a narcissistic one at that.

The shadow, according to American poet Robert Bly, is “the long bag that we drag behind us,” containing all the dark parts of ourselves that we would like to keep secret. The shadow may include our anger, selfishness, jealousy, pride, insecurity, wildness, or destructiveness.

Although these qualities are an integral part of us, we want to hide them or deny them. Eventually, they get out of the bag when we project them onto others—partners, friends, neighbors, or even other cultures.

The spiritual practice of shadow involves being able to recognize these elements and deal with them—when they make an appearance in our lives.

But it is so much easier to demonize enemies and blame things on something outside ourselves. Nations, political parties and religious institutions often do this as well as individuals. Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote, “If only it were all so simple. If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?”

Today, in response to a request by some of the first disciples to follow the way that he would outline, Jesus said, “Come and see.” And however awkwardly and full of missteps that have to be corrected at every turn, in the presence of that which is authentic, disciples continue to try and follow this way.

The prophet Isaiah said, “The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother’s womb God named me. God made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of God’s hand God hid me.” How many of us feel that we were destined to do something..to be someone...who could change the course in some small way for the good, and find ourselves caught up instead in mistrust and alienation one from another?

In such a time when the civil rights movement seemed for a time to be split between the forces of violence and those of non-violent resistance, Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “We must accept finite disappointment, but we must never lose infinite hope,” and, “The time is always right to do what is right.”

We have been asked to begin to talk with each other “in a way that heals, not in a way that wounds.” May part of our destiny as followers of The Way be to help widen a path towards healing. AMEN.

### ***Sermon Resources***

1. David Brooks, NY Times, January 15, 2011
2. quotes on forgiveness & shadow found in *Spiritual Literacy: Reading the Sacred in Everyday Life* by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussatt

## Scripture for Sunday, January 16, 2011

### **Isaiah 49:1-7**

1 Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away! The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me. 2 He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away. 3 And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." 4 But I said, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God." 5 And now the Lord says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength— 6 he says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." 7 Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers, "Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

### **John 1:35-42**

35 The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" 37 The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. 38 When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" 39 He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. 40 One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41 He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed ). 42 He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter ).