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## *The Language of Your Heart*

**A sermon by the Rev. Canon Lauren Holder  
The Third Sunday after the Epiphany – Year A**

There is something about Paul's exasperation in his letter to the Corinthians that I really enjoy. I don't think I have a sadistic sense of humor. It just rings true. It feels familiar. It could be in response to a Thanksgiving Dinner conversation, or a skirmish on the playground, or triangulating coworkers, or a backseat sibling showdown, or even a Facebook post of church geeks arguing the correctness of certain liturgical practices.

Brothers and sisters! For the Love of God! Can't we all just get along?!?!

And then Paul begins to name their divisions—which seem to amount to baptism one-upmanship. As a priest, this really cracks me up. Baptizing people is a joy every time. Yet here is Paul saying, "I thank God that I baptized none of you... well maybe a couple of you... or maybe more than a couple... I forget."

He is so frustrated with the divisions he's heard about, so ready to pull his hair out. And he is hoping he didn't contribute to the broken relationships that now break his own heart.

Gosh the early church doesn't sound so different from the church of today. We may not be arguing over whose baptisms are the most effective, but there are plenty other things to argue about. Who can get married, who can take communion, who can preach, who can teach, who can lead, whose truth is true, whose interpretation is correct, and yes, in some traditions, whose baptism is real.

Paul responds with this desperate letter to the church in Corinth. Imploring these early followers of Jesus to focus on just that—following Jesus. Not this disciple of Jesus or that disciple of Jesus, but Jesus!

Paul says: Jesus didn't send me to baptize. Jesus sent me to preach the good news! And I don't even have to preach it well! Because it's not about me. It's about the life and teachings of Jesus. It's about the sacrificial and vulnerable and victorious love of Jesus.

So as the preacher (who Paul points out doesn't have to preach with eloquence or wisdom, but just needs to point to the saving power of God incarnate in Jesus), let me say something about today's Gospel. Let me say something about the good news of Jesus calling us in the midst of our busy lives.

Last week we heard John's take on Jesus calling Simon and Andrew... today we hear Matthew's memory of that same story. In Matthew's telling, Simon and Andrew are casting their nets into the sea. Fishing was not a hobby for these two. It was not what they did to escape the daily grind. Fishing was their livelihood. It was their work. It's what they knew.

Jesus didn't have to know these two well to know fishing was the language they spoke. He only had to watch them working. He only had to pause and pay attention to what they were doing.

He said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

Now despite that being one of the most vivid Vacation Bible School themes I can remember—Let's fish for people!—a fishing God has never been an image that especially resonates with me.

You see, I grew up in a family that loved to fish. And as a kid I enjoyed fishing in Colorado every summer with grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, parents and siblings. But I didn't *love* it the way most of my family did. I

never graduated from fishing with spinners off the bridge to the artistry of fly fishing. I didn't speak the language. I would sometimes pretend to love fishing so I would belong, but the pretending never worked.

And so this image of fishing for people felt like wearing someone else's coat that was too small, or someone else's boots that were too big. I wanted to *want* to fish for people, I wanted to be a good Christian, but it didn't fit. I didn't fit.

One of my favorite writers, Debie Thomas, helped me think about this story differently. Instead of focusing on what fishing for people might look like, Debie Thomas points to the love and care with which Jesus calls these people—meeting them where they are. She says: “Jesus did not invite them to abandon who they were; he invited them to become their most authentic, God-ordained selves. He invited them to live into the fullness of the Imago Dei they were born with.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Ohhh. It's not that Jesus loves fishing and I have to love fishing too... for people no less. It's that Jesus loves Simon and Andrew and James and John, and Jesus speaks their language out of love for them.

This is true of you and me, too. It's why we find ourselves in this particular church on this particular Sunday. Because this language of liturgy—this prayer and scripture and music and receiving the Body of Christ—this is our shared language of God's love for us.

And it's why others find themselves in a different particular church on this particular Sunday—with a different shared language of God's love for us.

It's why some folks went to Saturday Mass last night, or some folks went to Shabbat services on Friday, or some folks are quietly walking trails this morning, or some folks are sitting at the bedsides of loved ones—because God has so many ways of calling us, out of a deep abiding love for us.

So, I'm sorry Paul, but we are not all of one mind. And that's ok because “the love of God is broader than the measure of the mind.” Remember that hymn?

It reminds me of another Vacation Bible School moment—one that took place here three or four years ago. At the end of an epic week of wonder, our young ones stood on these steps and sang the Bob Marley tune: “One love, one heart, let's get together and feel alright.”

Not one mind, but one love. Not one tradition, but one call. Not one expression, but one God.

Because God lovingly created you in the image of a loving God. God knows the language of your heart. And God calls you, exactly as you are, to follow the example of Jesus and walk in the way of Love.

Amen.

[1] <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/2507-i-will-make-you>