



## SERMONS THAT WORK

### Epiphany 2 (A)

#### Ends of the Earth

[RCL] Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-12; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42

“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.”

God is trying to do something so much bigger than we can imagine. How do we allow our thinking to get stretched?

The prophet Isaiah today seems to be saying on God’s behalf, “You think I am trying to get you to reconcile with your brother with whom you are not speaking or your lost tribe cousins?! Oh, not so small. What I am calling you to is big. It is *so* much bigger than that.” Isaiah clarifies God’s intention not to send him a messenger to the tribes of Israel only – but to the nations. We are talking the ends of the earth here. God’s plan? It is always *so much bigger* than our little human minds can comprehend.

In John’s Gospel today, monumental, ends-of-the-earth stuff is happening, too. In this story, which focuses on the whole institution of baptism, Jesus enters after the warm-up act, John the Baptist. John the Baptist isn’t totally clear with the crowds whom he’s the opener for; this is a world in which the players are bumbling around doing a little of this and a little of that, but are not completely sure how the whole thing fits together. Imagine John telling the story of how his small, everyday action, was made *so* much bigger.

He might say, “So, there I was, doing the thing. I am washing him in the water of repentance – baptism. I’m just going about my business, doing this thing with the water, doing this thing that God put on my heart. I mean, I knew that all of this was about getting ready for the One. But I just didn’t know exactly that *he* was *the* one. And then, it hit me. You have to understand, I had been baptizing so many people in the water. But this day, this extra thing happens. It is like a dove, like the Spirit from heaven coming down on this guy. It hits me again, only deeper. He’s the One. I mean, I know my first instinct when I saw him coming was “He’s the One,” but it did not stay with me. It’s like, God has to keep knocking me over the head with the knowledge! It is so big. I can’t quite take it in. God’s story. God’s message. It is so much bigger than I can take in. And the big story is unfolding around me.”

“The next day, I was hanging out with some of my friends. Get this. At this point, they are *my* disciples – nobody else’s. I tell them, ‘Hey, that guy over there, he is the One.’ I am getting deeper into this bigger picture. I can tell because everyone gets curious, following everything I say. They are taking me really, really seriously. They are taking my words really, really seriously. And even though they’ve been *my* followers, they’re getting really curious. This is all taking on a life of its own. They feel an urge to turn, and well, follow the One. And do you know how the One responds when he senses they’re following him? He turns around and confronts them with a question about their intentions. He asks, ‘What are you seeking?’ They respond with a *small story* answer. ‘Teacher, we just want to know where you are... where you stay.’ The One responds, ‘Follow me. Come with me and you will *see*. You will see where I am.’”

It almost reads like the One is saying, “Not only will you see where I am, but you can be with me there. I want you. I want you with me. I want to bless your seeking of truth. And later, I want to help you do the very same thing with others who will be drawn to me, just like you were.”

And the thing, the thing with John, the small thing of John getting it right and pointing toward Jesus? Well, he tells these two friends and they come close to Jesus. And just like it happened with John, being with him, spending time with him, they *know* he is the One. They start pointing. They start pointing it out to other friends. Andrew for one. And guess what? Andrew has a brother! And the brother? His name is Simon. Andrew, the friend of John the Baptist, tells his brother Simon about the man – the man who is the One.

And this bumbling, evolving, simple story, this story of a few friends among friends, is about to get bigger – much bigger. This brother named Simon will be renamed “Peter” – the Rock – by the One. The little story doesn’t stay a little story. It grows into a way bigger story of God’s imagining – an ends-of-the-earth kind of story.

We can’t take it all in. It is *so much bigger* than we can imagine. In fact, it is a journey of following that will take a lifetime. We will have moments of seeing and then, like John, we forget. And then we see again. It’s okay; God knows this about us. We are journeying to be with Jesus, in fits and starts *now*, but seeing the whole, big picture later.

And in the meantime?

Don’t worry about the bumbling. God already knows about that and picked you anyway. Just keep pointing. Just keep remembering. You will forget. And then it will come clear to you again. Others need to come. Others need to know where the One stays (Hint: it’s usually with the folks on the margins!). God is not going to give up. God’s target is not only your block. It’s not merely your parish. It’s not just your city. It’s your *heart* – and the very ends of the earth.

God is trying to do something so much bigger than we can imagine. How do we allow our thinking to get stretched? Where do you see glimmers of the One in your time? When have you felt an urge to turn and

follow the One? When do you get most excited about following – more excited than you had previously imagined? What might it look like for you to allow yourself to stretch, to allow *God's story* in your life to get bigger?

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