

St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church
Annual Parish Meeting
Report of the Priest in Charge
January 26, 2020

I hereby call to order the Annual Parish Meeting of St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church in Florissant, MO. I believe it's entirely appropriate and fitting to have our parish meeting begin during the Eucharist, and to give my Annual Meeting Report as the sermon today, because it's here where we bring everything we have and are, and place it on the Lord's table to be consecrated and blessed for the life and salvation of the world. And it's here in the Eucharist that God takes our ordinary and turns it into the extraordinary.

As you may remember from the Scripture readings we've been listening to these past Sundays After the Epiphany, God *calls* each of us individually, and calls St. Barnabas as a community, to a particular ministry in God's mission to this world, and to this community of Florissant.

In the reading from John's Gospel for last Sunday, we heard Jesus call the two brothers, Simon and Andrew, to come after Jesus and to see what Jesus is all about. It's noteworthy, too, that it's Andrew who first goes after Jesus, and then becomes a sort of "evangelist" for his brother, Simon, when he brings him to Jesus.

Two Sundays ago, the first one after the feast of the Epiphany, the Gospel reading was the story of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. When the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus in the form of a dove, and when a voice from heaven declares, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased," we are actually witnessing the CALL of Jesus to begin his mission in this world.

And this morning, the theme of CALL continues.

In today's reading from Matthew's Gospel, we get a somewhat different slant on the call of Andrew and Simon, fishing at the time, and a bit further on, the call of two other fisherman brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

Of course, we are also called. As individuals, as a parish, and as the Episcopal Church, we are called by God to speak out against injustice, and to speak out on behalf of those who are powerless and have no voice. The challenge, of course, always is to discern whether we really are speaking God's words, or whether we have our own agenda. Hence, the warning in Paul's letter to the Corinthians that "all of [us] be in agreement and that there be no divisions among [us]."

To guard against misspeaking in God's name, we must always trust in shared discernment. That's why it's important for the Vestry to pray constantly as they make decisions on behalf of the parish, and as they discern their own call to the next clergy person to "come and see" and serve as your spiritual leader.

My remarks this morning will be less an actual "report" and more my own observations of St. Barnabas.

Personally, I thank God for the dedicated group of people I've had the privilege to work with these past few months --- Vestry members and others --- who have labored so very hard to make this parish such a strong one. And I know that their hard work will continue in 2020. Just a couple of examples:

- I have been continually amazed at how knowledgeable and self-sufficient you are. Whether it be project leadership, or altar-guild functions, or other tasks, St. Barnabas folks know what they're doing and don't wait around for a clergy person to tell them when and how to do it. (And let me tell you, from lots of experience, this is a rare quality.)
- Another great strength at St. Barnabas is your music program and choir. Each Sunday, I'm so pleased to hear the choir, under Leah's strong leadership of course, perform beautiful anthems and support music. Lessons and Carols, on Christmas Eve, was another showcase for your many musical talents.

I realize that there are lots of challenges facing St. Barnabas in the coming months and years, but you are faithful and hard workers who don't shrink from those challenges.

That's who you are and who you can continue to be here at St. Barnabas. A community, a place, where you choose the extraordinary over the ordinary. Where you choose the hard over the easy. Where you choose to follow the call of Jesus.....and, as we might say in response to today's Gospel, not just sit around and keep fishing.

I will pray for St. Barnabas after I'm finished with my time here, and I'll look forward to seeing you respond to God's ever-new challenges under your next spiritual leader.

AMEN.