



Hineini

*Homily by Lisa Wiens Heinsohn given for the people of St. John's Episcopal Church, February 10, 2019
Luke 5:1-11*

My husband Jeff and I have a friend named Kevin who is a Lakota sundancer. Kevin's Lakota sundance is a traditional 8 day prayer ceremony over the summer solstice on Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. For two years, Kevin invited Jeff and I to come support him. This was an incredible experience and an honor, as people of European American descent, to get to witness and support.

One of the things we learned is that whatever we thought we were there to do, we should throw it out the window and just become present to whatever was in front of us, and seek simply to serve. We cooked and gathered stones and wood for the fires and made grocery runs to the town. There was one day before the dancing began, when all the dancers and supporters were asleep in our little village of tents on the prairie. It was about 4:00 in the morning, when all of a sudden we heard this huge voice saying, "Keith. Keith from Arizona. Keith." Over and over again. The voice obviously belonged to one of the singers who sat around a great drum, beating it and chanting traditional songs from sunup to sundown. In any case this singer was bound and determined to wake up Keith from Arizona, whoever that was. I can tell you that Jeff and I were thankful that neither of us were named Keith, because it was 4:00 in the morning. But we knew that we were there to serve, that we didn't have control, that our role was to listen and respond, when we were called upon to help. We never did find out who Keith from Arizona was or what he was called to do.

Today's gospel story is a story about a call. I don't know what you imagine being called by God should or does look like. I wonder if we imagine something dramatic, and unmistakable, like the Lakota singer booming out Keith from Arizona. In two of the four gospels, in Matthew and in Mark, when Jesus calls the disciples, it IS dramatic and immediate like that. Jesus shows up; he sees Peter and Andrew and James and John fishing; he says "follow me"; and for some inexplicable reason they do drop everything and leave their families and livelihood and follow him. It's amazing. But Luke's gospel is different. In Luke's gospel you get more of a closeup on what's happening when Jesus calls his first disciples, and it's not immediate or dramatic. It's a process.

First Jesus is teaching on the beach and he asks Peter to borrow his boat so he has some place to preach from. Peter says yes. Later Jesus asks Peter to put out to sea to fish—in other words, he meets Peter where he is as a fisherman. And in that place, he grants Peter something abundant and impossible: an overwhelmingly huge catch of fish where Peter knew there had been none. Peter recognizes he is in the presence of something far greater than himself, and that's when Jesus calls him. There is this slow process of Jesus meeting Peter where he is, showing him God's power in the middle of ordinary life, and only then inviting Peter to follow him.

In the Older Testament there are lots of stories about God calling a person. The person almost always responds with a Hebrew word, "*Hineini*." *Hineini* means, "Here I am." In today's reading from the prophet Isaiah, when God says, "Who will go for us?", Isaiah responds, "*Hineini*. Here I am, send me." *Hineini* is the response of a person who has encountered God, and who is willing to let go of control and live life differently, even though she or he has no idea what is coming next. When the disciples finally left everything

to follow Jesus, they were saying, in effect, *Hineini*. *Hineini* is more or less a combination of the second and third steps of alcoholics anonymous, which say, “We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity,” and then “made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.”

On the reservation for Sundance, Jeff and I knew that our stance toward whatever was needed should be, *Hineini*. That trip was an amazing pilgrimage, a time set apart from ordinary life. I think saying *hineini* to the call of God in ordinary life is far more difficult, and that is what Jesus was inviting the disciples, and is inviting us, to do. So how do we discern what the call of God is for us today? What is it that we are saying *hineini* to?

I was talking with Shane the other day about his recent trip to Indianapolis to the annual Episcopal Forma conference, which is all “faith formation,” whatever that means. During that conference, they talked about the fact that there really is a different way to live than what is all around us and embedded in us by our culture. God calls us, not so much to a specific destination, as to a way of life that is following Jesus. It’s the way of love expressed by our Presiding Bishop as involving seven verbs: Turn, learn, pray, worship; bless; go; and rest. John Bellaimey and Lynnell Mickelson are teaching about these practices in this morning’s adult forum at 10:00am and next week also. That churchy phrase “faith formation” just means doing these seven things, following Jesus’ way of life, increasingly more and more, in the power of God’s Spirit. It may not be as sexy as becoming a prophet or leading a movement or saving the world. God calls us to become apprentices who are practicing, and learning, a different way of being every day in the small things, over and over again, so that when the big things come we are ready to take risks, to recognize and choose to do what God has put before us.

These practices are both individual and communal. They are internal and external. They are about our intentions and our mindfulness, and they are about our political choices and the food we eat and how we choose to speak to each other. These seven practices can transform us to become the change we want to see in the world. The way of Jesus can help us turn from racism and white supremacy to become the Beloved Community. It can help us care for the earth and use our resources with respect and wisdom and the willingness to sacrifice for the greater good. The way of Jesus can lead us to recognize our ultimate union with God through contemplative prayer. And it can give us a path forward when life is so confusing, or so difficult, that we have no idea what to do.

Hineini is about the first practice of the way of Jesus, which is “turn.” It’s the beginning. It is about the choice, over and over again, to let go of old patterns that don’t serve us well anymore, to let go of control, and choose the way of love. To continue to be who we are, but differently.

In seminary we had this running joke that when God called a person, the response was almost always, “*Hineini*. Please choose someone else.” There are times when following the way of love feels too hard, or times when we are mad at God and don’t like the journey we’re on. This is why today’s story from Luke gives me so much comfort. Jesus didn’t force Peter to follow him at the drop of a hat. He met Peter where Peter was at. He took Peter out on the sea to receive a great catch of fish, exactly where Peter was spent and had no more resources. Only then was Peter ready to follow Jesus. I think God is the same with us.

So I wonder where each of you are at. I know that wherever it is, exactly as you are, that is where God seeks to meet you. Some of you are feeling great about life. Some of you are wondering what school you’re going to go to.

Some of you are dealing with serious family or health stuff. Some of you are hurt by church and wondering if there's anything actually real here. In each of these situations, what is God saying to you? Where is God encountering you? How might the way of love transform and heal you, and make you an agent of healing for others? What do you need to be ready to say, *hineini*?