

“Becoming Who You Are”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Congregational Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts
January 15, 2023 – Second Sunday after Epiphany

[Isaiah 49:1-7; John 1:29-42](#)

The apple falls not far from the tree. We are reminded of this maxim as we consider the lives of two people who sadly passed away this past week. One of these is Lisa Marie Presley, who followed in the footsteps of her father Elvis Presley in being a musician and passing away way at way too young of an age. Another person we lost who followed the path of his father is Robbie Knievel, who also died at too young an age, though only by the grace of God not sooner, as he spent his years doing what his father Evel Knievel did, jumping over things on a motorcycle, carrying on the dangerous family business because he believed that that’s what he was born to do.

In both of today’s scripture lessons we read about our own identity as children of God and how we too should live as we were born to live, apples that take on the characteristics of the tree from which we fell, following in the creative and loving ways of our divine Parent.

Our first reading from Isaiah follows last week’s lesson from Isaiah in identifying Israel as God’s beloved creation, formed by God to serve God and the world by bringing God’s light to the nations. We who follow the way of Jesus seek to continue this tradition of Israel of being God’s servant by bringing God’s light to the world’s people; our own calling is to follow our spiritual ancestors in carrying God’s life-giving light into a world in need of light.

Our second scripture reading from the gospel of John also tells us about our identity. In the reading, Jesus’ cousin John, who baptized Jesus, recognized that Jesus was more than just his cousin. When witnessing the Spirit of God descending upon Jesus at his baptism, John recognized Jesus’ identity as the Son of God, who would, like his heavenly Parent, baptize others with God’s Spirit. John went on to identify Jesus as the Lamb of God, and John’s disciple Andrew went on to identify Jesus as the Messiah, or Anointed One. While this reading is specifically about the identity of Jesus as the Christ, it also provides a lesson for us about our own identity as those of us who follow Jesus, his spiritual descendants, are to carry on his work of blessing others.

We who are baptized into the family and faith of Jesus, including young Camille, who we very gladly welcome into our clan this morning, are called to claim our identity as members of the living body of Christ in the world. As Teresa of Avila, a sixteenth-century Christian mystic, wrote of our identity: “Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which to look out Christ’s compassion to the world; yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good; yours are the hands with which he is to bless people now. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

Tomorrow, on Martin Luther King Day, we celebrate the life and work of one who took this calling to live as an active member of Christ’s body seriously. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Junior followed in the footsteps of his own father in preaching the gospel, and he consciously claimed his identity as Christ’s disciple by not only proclaiming good news, but tirelessly working for the liberation of others and the creation of a more just world for all. As we remember his legacy this weekend, may we be inspired by our spiritual brother to continue his way of living out his identity as a member of Christ’s body through our own compassionate, selfless acts of service and bold justice-seeking.

It is our calling, O Church, to act in love to change the world. This is what we were born for. This is the role we were baptized into. This is what God’s Spirit, who descends upon us all, empowers us to do. So become more of what you are called to be as a child of the God who created and loves all creation. Become more of who you are as part of the living body of Christ.

May the world we work to create for young Camille and all our children to live in be one full of life and love, where all flourish and enjoy the blessings of justice and peace. Amen.