

Epiphany 2
Church of the Good Shepherd, Silver City, NM
Parish Meeting Sunday

January 18, 2015
Rev. Paul Moore

The Divine Call

They were little puffs of noisy white down when I picked them up from the nest. I was between my freshman and sophomore years in High School. I had learned about falconry from books about birds, and my friend had located a kestrel's nest in a cleft in a dirt cliff. I managed to get into the nest and bring two of the four occupants home. He was to have one and I the other, and my interest in falconry began!

I took them home and put them in a cage I had constructed. It looked out onto a park in the city, and formed something of a cave like what I had taken them out of. They grew quickly, and their feathers began to emerge. Soon they were covered by their characteristic russet brown and tan, the malar stripe on their faces appeared, and they began to exercise their wings. I began taking them outside and giving them room to learn to fly. I didn't know how to fly, but I figured they had it in them, and they would figure it out—and they did.

I tried to teach them to come back to me, and I was only partially successful. They liked me well enough, but they were born to hunt mice and sparrows and grasshoppers. I was not very good at providing them with the opportunities they needed to hone their skills. The day came for each of them when they decided to be kestrels on their own, that they didn't need this clumsy parent any longer, and I saw them no more.

And it is all fitting, really, and deeply good. They were tiny falcons. Their long swept wings were built for speed, their tiny feet were made for grasping prey, and their formidable beaks were meant for slicing it up to eat. I, on the other hand, made a really lousy kestrel! Call it an "ugly duckling" story if you wish, because I did not know some of the rudimentary concepts in falconry. If I had kept them I would have had to relegate them to cages, and they would have become merely oddities in my house, exotic prisoners from an alien avian world, and divorced from what they were made for. As it was, these two little birds came into their own. They left to do what they were designed to do. They rejoined the community of kestrels in the city of Quito, Ecuador.

When the Divine Community's mutual love spilled over into creation the loving divine heart sought to be in relationship with the creation. Having created in, by and for love, the Creation was designed to love in return—to love as it has been loved. We are part of that creation. Like those little kestrels, we are not just amorphous lumps of living matter

with no purpose, nor are we just animals running around doing whatever we wish with no purpose or reason. We were created for something. We have free will. We have the capacity to love. We are created to love as we have been loved.

Some people have called this "the divine call on your life," and I can tell you the story of my call to ministry, but if you want to use that language let it be divested of any sort of imposed call from outside. God doesn't merely look at you and decide, "Well, I need someone to do thus and such. Old Gumercindo down there looks as good as any, I'll give him the task." No, the divine call of God on your life is organic to who you are. It is always a call to your own truest self, it is always a call to your fullest potential, and it is always a call to love as you have been loved. In other words, it's a call to become what you are.

In today's Gospel lesson Philip goes to find Nathaniel to come see Jesus. Philip has met Jesus and gets so excited he goes and finds Nathaniel. Nathaniel is more skeptical, so Philip says merely, "Come and see." Philip appears a number of times in the Gospels. Wherever you see him he seems to be linking people with Jesus. For example, he is the one who brings the little boy's lunch of five loaves and two fish to Jesus at the feeding of the 5000. He is one of the ones the Greeks go to at the festival and say, "Sir, we would see Jesus." Philip is being Philip in bringing Nathaniel, but not trying to convince him, just building a bridge between people and Jesus. He's not doing anything strange to his own being, he's just being Philip and also doing ministry. Your ministry is always a way of living to your fullest potential.

Jesus sees Nathaniel and says, "Behold, an Israelite in whom there is no guile." He knows Nathaniel just by looking at him. Nathaniel is not interested in the newest thing or the latest rage. He's got a healthy amount of skepticism in him, yet he's not beyond faith; he's a straight-up sort of guy. Following Jesus for Nathaniel is in no way in conflict with this deep aspect of his nature. Philip's invitation to him is to, "Come and see. Come and see for yourself who Jesus is. Your naturally clear mind will tell you the truth." The call of Jesus never asks us to be untrue to our selves. Rather, it is a call to the deepest and greatest integrity possible.

It's a call to love as you have been loved. Philip has found a good thing. The next thing he is doing is sharing it. "Come and see, Nathaniel. Here is the one we have been waiting for." In the end Nathanael is listed among the disciples along the lakeshore when Jesus appears to them after the Resurrection and reinstates Peter. Philip has done the most loving thing you could imagine. He has shared something good, he has called others into loving community. He has loved as he has been loved. The call of God is always a call to love as we have been loved. It is a call to share, it is a call to community.

Today is Parish Meeting. You worship here because you choose to, and we are grateful. Your membership here indicates your commitment to this particular portion of the Body of Christ. And in that God has called you here. This place is where your potential is to be worked out. Here is where you are called to be true to your own truest self, to live into the fullness of your potential, and to love as you have been loved.

Parish Meeting is where we organize our efforts in that regard. We listen to reports, we talk about plans, and we elect leaders. But it is more than merely a business meeting. It is a place where we seek to discern our particular role or contribution to the whole of what this body is all about. It is a time when we match the divine call of God on each of our lives with the divine call of God on this body together.

Where do YOU fit in this body?

- How can YOU learn to live out your truest self here?
- How can YOU reach for your greatest potential?
- And how can YOU love as you have been loved?