

Epiphany 2 A  
January 16, 2011  
Family of Christ Lutheran Church  
Chanhassen, Minnesota  
Pastor Kristie Hennig

**Isaiah 49:1-7; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42**



Pastor Jerry asked a question in his sermon last Sunday that stayed with me all week: “When do you feel the most like you?”

Here’s another, a follow up:

**“To what do you give your life and your strength?”**

Imagine what cocktail parties might become if we skipped the customary, “And what do you do?” and got down to the “why’s” of life.

What if, instead of introducing ourselves with the usual answer,

“I’m in finance” or

“I drive my kids from one activity to the next” or

“I have a pediatrics practice” or

“I’m a teacher”,

we answered with *God’s* definition – who we are in *God’s* eyes, instead of the limited and limiting way the world sees us:

what we do to earn a living and how we do or don’t fit into a family.

Isaiah reaches for a canapé on the counter and launches forth:

“When do I feel most like me? What do I give my strength to?

At the moment I’m in the travel industry,

but the Lord called me before I was born and named me.

The Lord gave me the gift of being able to explain things to others,

and now I am a polished arrow in God’s quiver,

waiting to be launched where God can use that strength

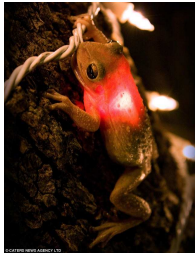
and I can feel more like the person God made me.

I have to say that the money in my current position is good –

and in this economy, I’m grateful to have a good job to support my family –

but to tell you the truth, I often feel empty and spent.

Yet my faith tells me I could be a light to the nations, shining from the inside out.”



And then Warren Schmidt,  
from the 21st century,  
looking a lot like Jack Nicholson in the movie “About Schmidt”,  
weighs in.

He tells the guests standing around the kitchen island  
about sitting alone in his nearly empty office on the day he retired from the job that  
had occupied his time for many years,  
watching the second hand on the clock slowly measure the remaining minutes of  
this part of his life.

At his retirement dinner, his best friend, Ray,  
offered ideas on what is significant in life.

Those ideas became a standard of measurement for Schmidt.

Unfortunately, he kept coming up short.

Possessions, accomplishments, and relationships were all less than satisfying  
because they focused on Schmidt and *his* comfort.

One day, Schmidt says, he returned to his old employer  
and discovered his life’s work was waiting to be carried off by garbage haulers.  
When he returned home, he heard an infomercial about a charity  
helping hungry children in developing nations.  
Something new came to life in Schmidt as he called and offered to sponsor a child.  
It is this openness to another’s needs  
that allowed him to begin reflecting on the disappointments in his own life.

Schmidt talks about finding a way to express the emotions he had neglected up to  
this point.

His steps toward healing were altered and hastened when his wife died suddenly,  
and Schmidt was thrust into an angst-filled search for something of significance on  
which to anchor himself.

As Schmidt wrote to Ndugu, the Tanzanian child he sponsors through the charity,  
Ndugu became his “confessor.”

He admits that at this point he was almost exclusively focused on himself, with little idea of the realities of Ndugu's life.

But as Schmidt explored his feelings about the relationships and accomplishment that filled his own life, he found Ndugu a safe person to help bear his sorrows.

To his surprise, Schmidt discovered that he could share financial resources to improve another's living conditions while that person could give *him* something *he* needed – care for Schmidt's thirsty spirit.

In his search for meaning, Schmidt tells his listeners, twirling their wine glasses, he listened to answers offered by others, but ultimately found meaning on his own. What he discovered was that he was most like himself when he was caring for another person.<sup>1</sup>

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At the top of the new year it's a good question to ask ourselves:  
"What makes me feel the most like me?  
What am I giving my life and strength to?  
Do the two line up?"

It's winter in Minnesota and we're dealing with a lot of darkness, and not just when the power goes off.

Only you know what that darkness is about for you.

Economic worries, employment, relationships, aging parents, illness, pain, loss, loneliness, boredom, anger, the effort of trying to keep it all together all the time...fill in the blank.

For too many young people in our community, life has gotten so dark they've used suicide to stop the pain. They were mistaken, but they thought there was no other way.

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<sup>1</sup> Chip Borgstadt, "Lessons from *About Schmidt*", *Seasons of the Spirit* worship planning resource for 2010-2011, WoodLake publishers, 91.

If you ever feel that bad, remember there is help for that,  
we told our confirmation students again last Wed.  
The warmth and light of caring conversation and professional attention  
is as close as the people who know the real you and love you anyway --  
as close as your family and friends,  
your coaches and teachers,  
your pastors and Life Guides and youth ministers.



In the midst of all that has its hands around our throats,  
all that worries us,  
all that makes us a little glum,  
we are here together this morning to celebrate  
the Light that has come into the world,  
the light that shines in the darkness.  
The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose birthday we mark tomorrow, said,  
“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that.  
Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”  
And he spent his life proving it,  
advocating for justice for all people using the tactics of nonviolence and truth-  
telling...  
about God, about people, about dreams,  
and what can happen when people of faith carry the Light of the world  
and carry it into the dark and scary places.

The world needs us to be who we really are –  
named and claimed by God in baptism,  
beloved and gifted in unique ways,  
living here for such a time as this...  
we are God’s arrows, polished and poised to hurl against the darkness.



Last week in the news there were a couple of dramatic examples of God's flaming arrows dispelling the darkness.

There was the story of Jordan Rice, the courageous 13-year-old Australian boy caught with members of his family in raging flood waters. Jordan died after insisting that rescuers save his younger brother first – even though he was terrified of water and couldn't swim.

And there was the story of Christina Taylor Green, the nine-year-old girl killed when Jerod Loughner opened fire on Rep. Gabrielle Giffords at a "Congress on Your Corner" event in Tucson. Christina's grieving family has donated some of her organs, which have already saved the life of another little girl in Boston. Her father, John Green told CNN, "That's what Christina was all about. It's a blessing."



These are poignant stories of extraordinary heroism and tragic sacrifice, shooting stars flashing brightly, then crashing on a dark horizon while the world watches.

Most of the time, God's call to be ourselves – shining from the inside out, launching into the familiar darkness around us – isn't nearly so sad or so dramatic.

Or so lonely or so impossible.

We are called as a community of faith to share in a calling to our families, our communities, and the world we touch.

When we share the load, we can bear it.

Here at Family of Christ in this in-between time,  
as a new chapter of this congregation's life together begins,  
we are asking ourselves who we are,  
why we are here,  
and what it is that God is calling us to be and do...

The transition team led by Dean Brown and Pr Jerry is gathering data and organizing a series of listening posts and cottage meetings so that we gain the benefit of all the ways God is speaking to God's people here – about the challenges and opportunities we face, about what God's preferred future for this congregation might be, and what kind of arrows God's got in God's quiver.



Christ – Lamb of God, Son of God, Messiah – invites us...  
to step up to the Table,  
to come and see,  
and then go and tell others...

“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.” – John 1:5

Thanks be to God!  
And all God's people say, “Amen.”

