

**Yr. A, Epiphany 2**  
**January 19, 2020**  
**Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan**  
**St. Peter's Episcopal Church**  
**1424 Words**

**Lessons:     **Isaiah 49:1-7****  
****Psalm 40:1-12****  
****1 Corinthians 1:1-9****  
****John 1:29-42****

One of my favorite things about my digital subscription to the New York Times is a somewhat regular feature entitled ‘Tiny Love Stories.’ These true stories, submitted by subscribers, convey so much love in 125 words or less. Romantic love, brotherly and sisterly love, parental love—it’s all there, sometimes with a picture (which might be worth another 1000 words). A sprinkling of tiny love stories helps you get through an intense news cycle. We need a reminder that there is tenderness in the world no matter what.

The best writers can say a lot in just a few words, much like the tiny love story we just heard *about God* written by the prophet, Isaiah. He wrote: “The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mothers’ womb he named me. He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away.”

There—in 48 words—we learn how God calls us before we show *any* potential whatsoever. We hear how God protects us when we are vulnerable. We discover how God completely trusts you and me to shine so that others may see the Light of salvation through us.

There is another side to Isaiah’s story—and to *our story*. *Our side* of the story often includes doubts and fears, disappointments and setbacks. In just 12 words, Isaiah lays it bare when he says, “I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing...”

We know how he feels, don’t we? You see, I fear the greatest problem for any Church is not ministry that is done incorrectly, but rather ministry that is never attempted, because people doubt their own gifts and are too afraid they might fail. People often recoil from disappointments and setbacks, rather than learn *through them* how best to try again.

If any of that sounds familiar, then you are in the same boat with Isaiah and many other people. And so I want you to remember the third part of Isaiah’s tiny love story—the part that describes how *God responds* to our doubts and fears.

God says, “It is too light a thing (too easy a thing) that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will (also) give you as a light to (all) the nations, so that my salvation may reach to the *end* of the earth.”

Just when you think you cannot handle the job you have been assigned, God asks even more of you. Now, that may not sound like love. It may sound unreasonable...even inconsiderate. Who wants to follow a God who piles on more work?

Well, here’s the thing. I don’t think God was piling on more work for Isaiah, nor do I think God gives us more work than we can handle. What *I believe* is that God believes that you are capable of simply letting the light of Christ shine *through you*.

You don’t have to create the light. You don’t have to fix the light. You simply get to *share the light* you have received. Let it shine...*through you*.

The Good News from today's Old Testament lesson is that God believes in us, even when we don't believe in ourselves.

God knows it is too light a thing that we should settle for being less than who we are capable of being, just because of doubts. God knows it is too light a thing for us to settle for being less than who we are capable of being, just because of disappointments. God sees more value in you and me than we are able or willing to see in ourselves. God knows that the cracks let the Light shine through.

A subscriber named Shari wrote this: "All I ever wanted was a dog, but Carlito was allergic and unmovable. I married him anyway, certain that love would prevail. One night while eating with friends in a restaurant, a 50-pound chandelier broke out of the ceiling, partly striking my head. *I* bled; *he* wept.

When the E.M.T. told everyone I would live, Carlito's friend leaned over my stretcher and whispered, 'Now's the time to ask for anything...'

We named the puppy Chandelier. Carlito sneezed every day of our dog's life, but he didn't care one bit."

The story of Isaiah (as well as the story of Carlito and Shari) remind us that we can do more than we think we can...we can *be more* than our doubts...we can be *so much more* than our disappointments. Each one of us is capable of letting the Light shine through us. This is what *God believes*. And what God believes is more important than what we believe.

St. Paul believed this very same thing about *his congregation* in Corinth. He gave thanks for them because of the grace—the Light—they had already received in Christ Jesus.

Paul wrote about them what I would write about you if I were to write a tiny love story about St. Peter's. "In every way you have been enriched in Christ...so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift."

*I really believe that!* I believe it because I have seen it...and heard it. I would like for you to believe it, too.

You need to believe it *more* than you believe your personal doubts. You need to remember the Light you have already received more than you remember your own setbacks.

Don't believe it because *you are faithful*. Believe it because *God is faithful*. That is what St. Paul reminded his congregation, and that is what I am reminding you.

The final, tiny love story we heard today is in the Gospel according to St. John. The title of that story is "Come and see."

John the Baptist was the greatest prophet who ever lived, according to Jesus. Yet, the most important thing *he did* through all of his ministry is no different than what Isaiah was called to do; and what St. Paul and the Corinthians were called to do; and what you and I are called to do—and that is to share the Light of Salvation which we have already received.

We don't have to create that Light. We don't have to fix that Light. Just let it shine *through you*.

*Especially* let it shine through the cracks of your doubts and fears. *By all means* let it shine *through* your disappointments and setbacks. God calls broken people to let the light shine through them.

You know, the absolute miracle of God's Light of salvation which shines to the ends of the earth is that it gets passed along just one person at a time by real people. If it were not for John the Baptist, Andrew may not have seen the Light. If it were not for Andrew, Simon Peter may not have seen the Light.

God could have chosen any perfectly magical method for sharing the Light of Salvation throughout the world. For better or worse, God chose you...and me...and all the other saints of God going all the way back to Isaiah, real people who simply invited *other people* to "Come and see."

I want you to give *yourself* a gift this week—this 2<sup>nd</sup> week of the *Season* of Light (that is what the Season of Epiphany is). Give yourself a blessing of enough time to write your own tiny love story—125 words or less.

Think about someone who invited you to come and see the Light of Christ. Think about all the different people who have let that Light shine *through* them—even *through* their imperfections. You might think of family members, friends, work colleagues, teachers, students, associates from long ago, even strangers whose names you do not know.

You can decide whether to keep your tiny love story or send it to someone as a little gift of gratitude. Maybe do both. Keep a copy and mail a copy. Perhaps we could compile our own parish Lenten devotional booklet, filled with tiny love stories.

On this 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in the Season of Epiphany, our collect reminds us that we pray to a God whose own beloved Son is the light of the world. And we pray that *all of us*—illuminated by God's Word and Sacraments—will shine with (all) the radiance of Christ's glory.

This is the Season of Light. So, let it shine.

Amen.