

## 5th Sunday Epiphany C 10

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February 7, 2010

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Today's lessons are powerful one for me as well as anyone who is in the ministry. These call stories of Isaiah and of the first disciples are reminiscent of our own call stories. Yet as we have heard these last few weeks each of us have received gifts and some of us are called to be preachers and teachers of the Word of God. Then there are the rest of you call to remain in your chosen vocation, yet also called to pass on the faith you have received, the faith in which you believe. Whenever I read these stories my mind floods back to my own struggle of being called to become a proclaimer of the Gospel. I especially remember the fear, the sense of unworthiness, the feeling that surely not I for someone else could do it better.

I struggled for months trying to determine my purpose in life, working to understand my vocation and straining to listen to God's voice. When I read the description of Isaiah's encounter with the holy those fears and feelings return. Can you imagine how he felt? Here is Isaiah sitting in the largest building of his day. Here in the Temple in Jerusalem which is many times larger than First English it is on the same scale of the great cathedrals of Europe, maybe even larger than St Peter in Rome. Here this grand space is filled to overflowing with just the hem of the robe of God. If that were not enough a flock of Seraphs were flying around and around and around singing in their loudest voices, "Holy Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts." Now these were not the cute little cherubs, but scary winged creatures whose voices

February 7, 2010

were deafening as the sheer sound of their voices shook the thresholds of this massive Temple.

It is no wonder that Isaiah proclaims, 'woe is me, for I am lost, I am unclean.' In other words, I holy \_\_\_\_\_, well you fill in the blank. I am not ready, I am not prepared and I am about to die. To which God responds, 'your sins are forgiven, you are worthy and now I need you to be who I created you to become.' So when the question comes who will go and the only response available was, 'here I am, send me.'

While I did not encounter God in such an overwhelming manner, I know how Isaiah felt. I had been fighting this feeling God was asking me who he was to send. I kept saying not me. Then one weekend I attended a spiritual retreat at a local catholic church. One night after the evening worship I sat for a couple hours in this large sanctuary, maybe twice the size of ours. There may have been one other person in this place which held 500 people. It was mostly dark except for a few candles and lights. When at the same time I became both frightened enough to almost get up and run away while at the same time felt a peace and calm that reassured me it was ok for me to stay. It was for me a time to say I will stop fighting you while at the same time saying, God you need to work with me here, I am unworthy, do you really know who you are asking to do this? I can now look back and understand the peace I felt was God saying, Yes, I know who you are and what you are meant to be. So I will slow down and let you catch up as you follow me on this path.

February 7, 2010

In the Gospel lesson we are still at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Jesus enters the scene being pushed by hoards of people seeking to get close to him hungry for the word of God. His only opportunity to create a little space is to get into the boat of Simon and put out from the shore. There buffered by the water Jesus sits down and begins to teach them. At this point in Luke, we know Jesus is known and many are following his every move, hanging on his every word. But Simon may know little of this man who steps aboard his little boat. Yet very soon Simon's fate will be changed forever. Jesus asked him to put out in to the deep water for a catch. To which Simon responds respectfully, ' Master, we have worked all night and caught nothing, but if you say so I will.'

I almost wonder what Simon really thought at that moment. This guy may be some great teacher, I hear he is a healer, but what does he know about fishing. I have been on this lake all my life and I know where the fish are and when to catch them. Yet out of respect or maybe just to humor this guy, Simon puts down his net. To his surprise the nets are filled to overflowing. Here the English does not do it justice in putting before you the picture of what is taking place. As you fisherman know, netting a fish is not always as easy as it sounds. Fish fight to stay in the water, they resist being forced up out into the air. As a young boy my brothers and friends used to save for minnows to go fishing. We would get these nets and herd the small fish into shallower and shallower water to net them. As we did the fish would fight and flop and splash and jump doing whatever they could to get away. The water

## 5th Sunday Epiphany C 10

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February 7, 2010

would almost swarm with fish. This is the scene with Simon and his nets. As he pulled the nets it was more than they nets beginning to break. It was there were so many fish the water was churning, the fish were flopping and falling out of the net, the fish everywhere. As Simon and his partners got them in the boats, the boats were active and moving with fish flopping, hitting each other, smacking the fishermen almost knocking the into the water.

It is no wonder Simon falls at Jesus knees, calling him not master but Lord. Go away for I am sinful, I am unworthy, I am not prepared to be in your presence. To which we hear Jesus say, 'do not be afraid, for now on you will be catching people.' Yet that is exactly what those men were, afraid and they should have been. Here they were about to be called and sent to net people, catching them, pulling the out of the water, away from the comfortable and familiar into a new life with Christ. So it is surprising that when they reached the shore Simon and the others followed Jesus. Yet what Jesus was really saying to Simon and the others is that you are forgiven, you are worthy and precious in my sight. I am sending you might become who God needs you to be.

So what about you? It may seem as if these verses are call stories for pastors, for ministers who go out to preach and teach and share the Gospel. I fear you will walk away today saying so what? I have never had such an encounter with the holy, I have not felt the calling to leave all I have and go preach to others. To which I say, this is your story and your experience as well. Often we come with a vision of God who fits in our hearts, proclaim

## 5th Sunday Epiphany C 10

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February 7, 2010

Christ as God in flesh, and at the same time somewhat believe he is and was limited just as we are limited. But our God is so much bigger than that. It would only take a thread from the hem of his robe to fill this space. It is here in this same place we come feeling unworthy, sinful and unclean yet hungry for the word of God, longing for the Good News of Jesus Christ. It is here we encounter the Holy.

I sometimes ask people why they come to worship. Some say it is because my parents or spouse force me to come and others come for their children. Some will say it is because they need the encouragement and the connection to their faith to help them make it through the week. Some tell me they do not come to worship because they often feel unworthy, not prepared or ready to be in God's house. Yet that is exactly why they should come so they can hear God say, 'you are forgiven, you are worthy of my love, you are precious in my sight.'

For it is here we also hear the accounts of those great men of faith who also felt unworthy, untimely born, the least of the proclaimers of the Gospel. Not all are called to be preachers of the Good News, but all are sent to proclaim and to give witness to what it is they have come to believe. To hand off and give to others that which you have received, that is that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day in accordance with the scriptures. Then he appeared to the disciples, the leaders of the church and finally to us. Jesus does not wait for us to be perfect or be prepared. Jesus catches us, nets us,

## 5th Sunday Epiphany C 10

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February 7, 2010

drags us kicking and screaming out of our everyday life into a new world.

Here Christ proclaims us sinless, forgiven, worthy and precious in his sight.

Here Jesus calls and sends us out so we might become to be the person God created us to be. We are sent as housewives, teachers, computer workers, office workers, fathers and mothers, city workers and business owners with a mission to share the good news which you have received, in which you also stand through which you are also being saved.

AMEN

T.G.B.T.G.

*Pastor Michael*