

## A Beacon of Hope

### I. A Preaching Success

A. Last week we heard of the near disaster that followed Jesus' preaching in his home town of Nazareth.

1. The townspeople became a mob that ran him out of the Synagogue with the intent to kill him. ---
2. Today we hear of a very different reception by the Lake of Gennesaret, or as it is better known, The Sea of Galilee.
  - a. Luke says, "*the crowd was pressing in on Jesus to hear the word of God.*"
    - (1. Jesus had healed a possessed man in Capernaum and people were amazed, asking "*what is there in this man's words?*"
    - (2. We're told, "*report(s) about him began to reach every place in the region.*" (4:36)
3. Luke gives us this visual image:
  - a. There were two empty boats at the shore and Jesus asks one of the fishermen who were cleaning their nets to row him out a little ways so Jesus could address all the people beside the sea.

B. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "*Set out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.*"

1. There was something to this man Jesus that compelled Simon to stop washing his nets and let Jesus have the use of one of his boats.
2. Now this seasoned fisherman has a little trouble hearing the next request.
  - a. "*Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing.*"
3. The rough and tough fisherman must have been impressed by this in-lander, Jesus, enough that he would listen to an amateur advise him what to do.
  - a. "*If you say so, I will let down the nets.*"
  - b. And when they did they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break.

- c. Luke fills in such graphic physical details that we can almost imagine ourselves being there.

## II. An Epiphany

- A. Certainly this is not a story about Jesus helping Simon succeed in his fishing business.
  - 1. Jesus comes into this situation where these professional fishermen were giving up, *“having worked all night long and caught nothing.”*
    - a. Luke tells the story as an epiphany for Simon, coming face to face with the numinous presence of God in this man Jesus.
      - (1. His instinctual reaction is a feeling of smallness, confronted with awe and amazement.
      - (2. His immediate response, *“Go away from me, Lord for I am a sinful man.”*
    - b. Sinfulness here doesn’t mean bad or wretched.
      - (1. Rather, Simon felt small and inadequate. Even his professional judgment as a fisherman now seemed faulty.
- B. It is helpful to read the same story in the Gospel of John.
  - 1. Most of the details are the same.
    - a. Except that John tells this story as an appearance of the risen Lord after the Resurrection. (Jn. 21:1-13)
    - b. The story from the ministry of Jesus is recast around themes of resurrection (Jesus’ appearance) and Eucharist (fish in Galilee means food).
      - (1. The large catch of fish is a miracle of sustenance for the new community that Jesus is creating.
    - c. Jesus’ words to Simon *“Do not be afraid!”* are the same words of assurance of the risen Lord to his disciples.
  - 2. For Luke it makes sense to tell this story as one of call for the first disciples, a kind of preview of the resurrection.
    - a. The story then becomes a parable of what it means to follow the resurrected Lord of the church, ---
      - (1. following even through times of frustration and defeat.
- C. Simon moves through a personal transformation in this story.
  - 1. He moves from the security of a fixed, failed reality –
    - a. *“We fished all night and have nothing,”*---
    - b. into full, open, new and uncontained reality –
      - (1. *“... they left everything and followed him.”*
  - 2. Jesus speaks words of comfort, *“Do not be afraid!”*

- a. and also a challenge opening up something entirely new,
- b. *“from now on you will be catching people.”*
- c. The fishermen are themselves “caught” by Jesus and given a new vocation, the work of the kingdom of God.

### III. The Call of God

A. Our lectionary this Sunday in Epiphany gives us two parallel stories of call; that of the prophet Isaiah and the Apostle Paul.

1. In both of these, like that of Simon, an encounter with the utter holiness and otherness of God leaves the recipients with an overwhelming awareness of their sin, their inadequacy to respond.

a. Isaiah says, *“Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”*

b. Paul recounts the appearances of the risen Christ to others and then says,

(1. *“Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”*

2. These stories of the call of God illustrate the overarching theme of scripture.

a. That is the divine solidarity with our human predicament, the world and people simultaneously broken yet utterly filled with the divine.

b. We are a broken people and we live in a broken world; reality isn’t perfectly logical, fair or consistent.

(1. But that doesn’t mean our reality, whatever particular form it takes, is meaningless and absurd.

(2. It’s always filled with contradictions which we all resist and oppose for much of our lives.

(3. The Franciscan, Richard Rohr calls it the cruciform pattern of all reality. [Richard Rohr, Coincidence of Opposites, CAC meditation for Thursday, February 7, 2019]

B. Isaiah’s vision in the Temple leaves him with a dreadful commission, to inform God’s people of inevitable exile.

1. The nation will be like a tree felled and burnt.

2. But when the worst has occurred,\ and the smoke has cleared away,\ the stump of the tree,\ blackened and ugly,\ may again put forth new shoots.

- a. After exile there will be new life.
- b. Isaiah's vision here is a microcosm of the entire book.
- 3. His commission is an incomprehensible vocation.
  - a. *"Say to this people, 'Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.' Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed."*
  - b. It's interesting to note that in each of the four gospels, Jesus appeals to this prophesy to explain why some in Israel fail to understand his preaching. [Mt. 13:10-15, Mk. 4:12, Lk. 8:10, Jn. 12:39-41]
  - c. Again in the Book of Acts, Paul quotes this same text to describe the failure of his own mission to convince the entire congregation of Israel about Jesus. [Acts 28:26-27]
  - d. Perhaps the Hebrew interpreters give us a clue how we may take this difficult passage when they translate the Hebrew text into the Gk Septuagint. The tense of the verbs is changed from the imperative to the indicative.
    - (1. In other words, instead of God saying *"go and say to this people..."*, rather God says what Isaiah's expectancy should be: that *"this people's mind has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, etc."*
    - (2. Again, it is a way of saying that the national disaster that Isaiah is to expect, could be a way of cleansing and there is a possibility that new life could grow out of the burnt out stump.

- C. Simon, who was to be called Peter, learned from his Master - who carried within himself the mystery of universal suffering.
  - 1. Jesus allowed it to change him which is what the resurrection is all about.
    - a. Jesus invited Simon to allow this to change him too.
    - b. And then those the disciples catch in their nets, to restore those to life who were under the threat of death.
    - c. That includes you and me here, that we could be freed from the endless cycle of projecting our pain elsewhere or remaining trapped inside of it.
    - d. For every Christian this is an invitation, not a requirement.
  - 2. But the people who hold the contradictions and resolve them in themselves are the saviors of the world.

- a. Rohr calls them, “*the only real agents of transformation, reconciliation, and newness.*” [Rohr, *ibid.*]
- b. As God’s multi-textured truth takes hold of our hearts and minds, we can expect:
  - (1. What God burns into us, we are to pass on.
  - (2. God still calls prophets to speak the prophetic word the world most needs to hear.