

5 Epiphany
February 10, 2019

**In the name of God, who in Jesus
 taught us the meaning of unconditional love.
 Amen**

Each of our Scripture readings this morning points in some way to those moments when we become aware of the mysterious presence of God in our own experience....or at least an awareness that there's something going on that's strangely different.

For example, in the first reading, Isaiah is faced with a major change in his responsibilities and he enters the temple to reflect on the meaning of recent events in his life. In doing so, he is given a vision of God, that ultimately becomes his vocation, his calling. Isaiah's experience is very much ours...at least for many of us. He comes to an intense sense of God's presence even as there is a sense of everything somehow shifting beneath him. For Isaiah, we read, "the house filled with smoke"...there was no single clear road into the future. This passage gives us a great pastoral gift if we will just stay with it. It shows us someone, who in many ways is a spiritual giant, yet who is still unable to say "yes" to the call of God when first called! This should be comforting for us, because most of us are not over eager to respond with a fervent and immediate "yes" to the call of God. So, let's stay with this first lesson. By looking closely, we see that as Isaiah becomes aware of the presence of God, he feels deeply disturbed. Then sweeps over him a sense of utter inadequacy. I think it is a feeling many of us can identify with. He says, "I am lost. I am a man of unclean lips." And, he feels equally despairing about the society he lives in...again a very common experience these days. He says, "I live among a people of unclean lips." Notice what happens now. The little word "yet" makes the difference. Isaiah feels that neither he, nor his society, has anything to offer God. YET, he can not completely walk away from this presence, this presence that he feels certain is somehow God. He writes, "YET my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." He feels strangely held in God's presence. And in this moment of hesitation, the Grace of God is given! Isaiah is touched by the gift, the fire even, of grace! He is enabled to see himself differently. Think of it! He hears from within, "Your guilt has departed." His sense of inadequacy is summarily dealt with. It is not so much that he is, or he is not, inadequate... to respond to God. We are ALL inadequate in some ways. But, something tells Isaiah, and...each one of us...that any sense of inadequacy, actual or simply believed, all of it is taken up and used for God's purposes. We are enabled to offer ourselves, yes, just as Isaiah said, "Here am I...just as I am, adequate OR inadequate...here am I...send me!"

Many of you have heard me refer to a favorite theologian and author: Henri Nouwen. The book that put him on the map was entitled, "The Wounded Healer." Because, as he writes so persuasively, it is our very wounds, our very places of insecurities, or as in Isaiah, our very sense of inadequacies, yes, these very wounds...that give us the best tools for being healers for others who are hurting. What we may think is a failure, a lacking, a liability, may in fact be exactly the way of connecting with another who is hurting. In other words, what we might consider to be our limitations, with God's Grace, become our gift to another.

Turning now to our second reading, the Epistle of Paul to the young church at Corinth. Paul, of all people, knew how unworthy he was. Remember, he had intentionally persecuted the young Church. That is why he proclaims loudly, boldly, constantly, that he “is an apostle by God’s Grace.” He knows well that his ministry, his accomplishments, his effectiveness are all because of God’s Grace...manifested in and through him.

I know Paul’s letters can sometimes be a challenge for us to understand. Certainly, today’s message seems somewhat convoluted, but, even so, hopefully his message comes through... that he and the other disciples carried the Good News so that others might come to believe. And I suggest, that is still our charge as well, to speak of the difference our faith makes in our lives, the difference it makes to have a sense of God’s presence with us. Or for some, it is to speak of the wondering why it is that they are not sensing God’s presence. But, it IS to acknowledge that there is something mysterious that is a part of our lives whether proclaimed, avoided or dismissed.

So now, here we have another example of how God has loved someone and chosen them. The familiar story of Jesus calling Peter and the others to trust him and to fish as he told them, ought to make US ponder. Are we like Peter? Jesus told him what to do, but Peter protested, saying...”Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing...yet, if you say so I will let down the nets.” So, like us. At first he protested, but then he relented. And look what happened. The very thing he had been trying to do on his own, happened in an unlikely way, and when Peter saw the abundance which came forth, he fell on his knees and exclaimed, “I am not worthy.” But, then, ... I think, ... “Who is?”

Jesus saw the fishermen come in from a hard night with nothing to show for their efforts. He interrupted their cleaning ritual, sat in their boat and began to teach. He walked into their midst. ///// He comes to us as well, right where we are in our regular lives.

Jesus asked Simon Peter to set out again after a night of profitless work, and more than that, to set out into deep water. Peter, the fisherman, the consummate sailor, listened to the Master. Despite the fact that they were tired from the night’s work, they set out into deep water and made a huge catch. A catch that was so striking it led Peter to ask Jesus to leave him, for he was a sinful man and he felt so inadequate in the presence of such holiness and power. Simon Peter had been catching fish. Now he is going to be catching people. Once again, The Lord speaks of the unknown in terms of the known. He uses their daily occupation to unfold to these fishermen the nature of the work to which he was calling them. It is interesting to notice how often in the Gospels, Christ is revealed to people while they are busy in their worldly occupations. It seems that Grace happens ...wherever we are.

What about us this morning? Our Lord is still in our midst, still teaching us. How well do we listen to his words of challenge? Jesus asked Peter and the others to set out into deep water, mysterious waters. And weren’t they surprised at the outcome. You and I have listened to the Master’s words. Has He asked us to move out into deep water, into a new and perhaps unsure situation? Why do we doubt? And why do we say that we are not worthy or that He should ask

someone else? Remember the slogan: “Lord, help me to remember that nothing will happen to me today that you and I together can’t handle.”

The challenge of Jesus and the Gospel is that we should, with His grace, move out into uncharted waters. I think we are doing that at St. Cyprian’s. St. Francis said: “Preach the Gospel at all times – if necessary – use words!” Think about it. We are called to live our lives in such a way that others would be caught by our love of the Lord. Perhaps He is calling us to become more patient, more loving, more accepting of our shortcomings, more forgiving of ourselves and of others.

Perhaps the Lord is calling us to a depth of relationship that, like Peter, causes us to fear. We, like Peter, may make our excuses; not this year; I’m not that holy; I am too busy, too shy, tired, unprepared, ...you name it. Peter and the others left their nets; we are asked to leave our excuses.

Be not afraid. Jesus assures each and every one of His disciples to let go of fear. Deep water causes fear. We need to take a moment to name our fear. What has kept us from being more caught up in the love of the Lord? Jesus is rest and peace for us, and He asks us to come to Him without fear. We are safe in the net of His embrace.

There is a beautiful Gaelic song, an Irish song, that prays, “By the Christ of the Sea, May WE be caught in the nets of God.

May it be so for each of us, more and more each day.

AMEN