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SCRIPTURE COMMENT. 5 C, 2019

Isaiah 6:1-8; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11

Luke's Gospel, still in the beginning chapters, tells the story of the calling of the first apostles, the familiar fishermen, Peter and James and John. So the setting is familiar, but the story is told differently by Luke. There's a little more psychology in the event, a weighing of the implications. Like the stories of great calling events in the Bible, of Moses, for example, or Jeremiah or Mary Mother of Jesus, there's a moment of hesitation, questioning. This involved Peter's awakening to his humanity, as a sinner.

The parallel we hear today is the calling of Isaiah. Like Peter, Isaiah hesitates because he feels involved in uncleanness. Then in the Letter to the Corinthians, Paul talks about his own calling, in the context of meeting the risen Jesus. Paul too is aware of his sinfulness, a matter that does not get in the way of his being fruitful and confident.

HOMILY. 5 C 2019

"Leaving Your Boats"

Let's put these three figures side by side: Isaiah, Peter, Paul. Each of them in an encounter with God, close to a change in life, some change in priorities. Each aware of their own sinfulness.

Isaiah is being asked to speak truth, as prophet, to the King of Judah, which would mean to call him to trust God, not his own armies; to follow the way of Judaic faith, not to bargain with the pagan world.

Isaiah backs off. He feels as fearful and unclean as the king. "An unclean man in an unclean nation, he cries out. Don't send me." And so an angel intervenes: touches his lips. "Trust the word of God trust what you believe from your own heart. Speak the truth, tell the king to trust God, not his own politics."

“Speaking the truth to power:” this is a hard road. Cutting through the lies. Isaiah steps up.

It’s similar with Paul, who was once a man of violence, persecuting the new Christian community. He hated them for ruining the Judaic tradition, following the Risen Christ. Paul had the zeal and permission to put such people to death, until he too is face to face with Christ who says to him: “why this violence, why do you put people to death? I am the Christ you hate, but I am open to receiving you right now.” And this man too comes to trust what he learns from the light that knocks him down, that strikes him dumb and blind, and he knows then a whole new possibility for life and faith is in front of him. He gets help from fellow travelers. And he follows the way.

These are moments of waking up: painful awakenings. They are invitations to push through your own sense of unworthiness, or your own fear that you can’t make a difference. It is so much a part of our era, our politics, our church. We face moments like this when we step up to listen to refugees, or want to trust our instinct to work for saving our environment, So many of you keep pushing through resistance, or the fear that the powers against us are too big. Like ending racism. It helps to stand with other people who share your conviction it is possible to find the voice of your own truth: like Isaiah, like Paul, as you come to understand that it is God’s truth you are hearing.

So it is with Peter in the boat. What happens then to him? You must notice how unsettling it is for an experienced fisherman to have his boat and his work just taken over, Jesus moving in, coming close, asking for time, asking for room. This is how Jesus is, interrupting our quiet hours or our accustomed work. Sometimes you might be going about your own business, managing your family, teaching a class, balancing your budget, and the phone rings, someone comes in on you. You’re needed somewhere. Oh no, does it have to be me? I can’t help out in a youth group. No, not voter registration. You don’t know me if you’re asking this.

And on the other end of the request, you hear it IS you,
you that people hope to work with.
That you are right for the job, you are wanted.
That's the risk, that you are really wanted, just as you are.

I'm thinking this gives a glimpse of what happened to Peter,
seeing the abundant power of Jesus right under his own nets.
New empowerment is possible.
Then, as with the fearful Isaiah, or the self-righteous Paul,
your world is suddenly larger than what it used to be.
There is a presence in the request, an urgency, like grace.
That's what it is to hear the voice of God, to see a sudden light:
to feel this Presence, this urgency, and grace: a sense that you can say yes.

You think at first, well, maybe later, not right away,
but then you look down, and you are standing ankle deep in fish.
And like Peter, you know your life is getting bigger.
Your routine patterns feel all used up.
And besides, Jesus is in your boat already!

As one commentator says,
God does not deny human sinfulness but does not accept it as an excuse.
It is a fact, our narrow minds, our inexperience,
but it doesn't matter.
"Stop focusing on yourself," God says again and again.
It is my work being done in you.
That's what Paul remembers all the time:
"by the grace of God I am what I am,"
no longer consumed by fear and anger,
but a companion to the work of God in my world.

So they brought their boats to the shore,
left everything, and followed him.