

Isaiah 6:1-8, [9-13]

Psalm 138

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Luke 5:1-11

One of the most dangerous things a person can do, in terms of social interaction, is to ask an ordained person to share their 'call story.' You could be there for a long time! These stories are always fascinating and each one is unique, but they also tend to be pretty long and detailed. I've gotten mine down to about 90 seconds and even that now seems a bit too long to me. We can all be intrigued by an ordained person's call story, but what we may not realize is: each and every one of us has a call story. As baptized Christians we are all called...all beckoned...into God's service, we just might not yet realize it. Christianity is not a spectator sport and there's no such thing as a 'benchwarmer' in service to the Lord. We are all on the team. And each one of us has an invaluable part to play in proclaiming the kingdom and in providing experiences of that kingdom to others. There are lots of reasons why we don't get up off the bench or sometimes even put on a uniform. Sometimes it's because we're uncertain of what's expected of us. Or maybe it's because we just don't know *how* to do what Jesus is calling us to do. Sometimes it's because we are simply too tired to do any more. And sometimes it's because we just plain don't want to. Can you relate to any of these feelings? Underneath all these reasons may be an even more profound barrier. It may be that we just don't feel worthy to go out into the world and represent Christ because we are aware of how sinful we are; we are aware that we don't measure up; and we are completely overwhelmed by our sense of not being good enough.

If that's the case, we are not alone in those feelings. As we hear the description this morning of Isaiah's encounter with God...with the angels...with the surreal sense of having the pivots on the thresholds shake and the house fill up with smoke, we also hear him say, "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips;" Don't we all know just how he feels? We know that we are lost. We know that each of us has unclean lips and we know that we live among a people of unclean lips. If we're feeling that we're unworthy, we're in fine company with Isaiah. But even with all his doubts and his overwhelming sense of unworthiness, Isaiah volunteers to do the Lord's bidding. When God wants to know who he shall send to speak to the people, Isaiah pipes up, "Here I am!! Send me!!" And then we realize that God has sent Isaiah on a seemingly impossible mission. And we can't help but wonder if we are willing to volunteer for a similar challenge.

And then we hear from St. Paul, our patron saint. As we heard this morning in our Epistle reading, he's impressing upon the parishioners at the church in Corinth all that he has given

them in terms of knowing the circumstances of Jesus' life, of his ministry, of his mission, of his death and of his resurrection. He even reminds them that Jesus appeared to over 500 people at one time and in one place after he was resurrected. But even as he reminds them of all that he has told them about Jesus, he also reminds them of his own sense of inadequacy when Jesus appeared to him and pressed him into service. Paul, too, knows that even though he is a well-educated man and a man of the world; even though he has many skills; he feels a deep sense of unworthiness in having been such a zealous and successful persecutor of the church...of Jesus himself. No one has better reasons to feel humbled and unworthy than Paul. And yet, the overwhelming love and forgiveness from Jesus himself wins him over and he becomes one of the most powerful apostles in history.

It is that experience of Jesus that strikes us all today. It is in having a personal experience or a personal witness of Jesus' forgiveness and love that wins us over. Nothing is more powerful or moving. As Jesus works his way down to the shore of the Sea of Galilee...or what has been called the lake of Gennesaret in today's gospel reading...Jesus knows that the fishermen who have just brought in their boats after a fruitless long night of fishing are exhausted. Jesus steps into one of the boats and begins to teach to those that have followed him there and have gathered around. When he's done, he tells the weary fishermen to get in their boats and let down their nets in the deep water. Their first internal reaction must have been, "Are you kidding?" Now they've finished their day's work. They've cleaned their nets and folded them away in preparation for the next day...not now! But Jesus insists. Take your boats out to the deep water and let down your nets.

The deep water. That's a metaphor for chaos. God brought order out of chaos by moving over the deep water in creation. Jesus asks us to go out to the chaos...out to the deep water.

The deep water. That's where we are vulnerable. We can't touch the bottom or even see the bottom. We are at the mercy of whatever comes along in the deep water.

The deep water. That's where danger lies. Everything about the deep water is beyond our control. It's full of the unknown.

But that's where Jesus sent them and that's where Jesus sends us...to the places where we are vulnerable...to the places where we can't exercise control...to the places that are full of the unknown...to the places that are chaotic and sometimes to the places that feel dangerous.

As tired and bewildered as they are, these simple fishermen do what Jesus asks them to do...not knowing why...not knowing what will come...they simply do as Jesus tells them to do. And that's what Jesus expects from us. That's our call from Jesus.

The reward for such obedient and risky behavior is a catch of fish that is so large it threatens to swamp their boat, so they call for help from the other fishermen around and they load down two boats before they manage to get their tremendous haul of fish ashore.

Jesus calls to them and they respond. Jesus gives them an assignment and they comply. Jesus invites them to take a chance and they do. And what came back to them was abundance beyond their wildest dreams. They had been out fishing all day...and all night...without Jesus...doing the same thing over and over again...working as hard as they could and they had gotten no results. They went out on Jesus' command and were overwhelmed with abundance. Having Jesus with them made all the difference in the world. Asking Jesus to go with us makes all the difference in the world to us as well.

Immediately, Simon Peter realizes the power that Jesus has. He's just witnessed it. He has just experienced it. He's so overwhelmed that he falls down at Jesus' knees and begs him to go away because he's suddenly aware of how sinful a man he really is...and he feels completely unworthy and inadequate in the face of so much love and so much power. Simon Peter is not an educated, worldly man. He's a simple fisherman. All he knows is how to fish. But Jesus sees something else. Jesus sees a depth and passion in Simon Peter that can be put to good use in the proclamation of the good news. Simon Peter thinks that all he can do is be a fisherman, but Jesus says to him...and to his partners, James and John, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will be catching people."

Even now Jesus says to each one of us, "Do not be afraid." Jesus knows our fears and our reservations and our deep sense of not feeling that we have enough of value to offer to him or to God. It's easy to say to ourselves, "What good could I possibly be to God?"

That's a question that we don't need to know how to answer. Jesus has the power to use our skills in ways we had never imagined and to get results we've never dreamed of. All we need to do is blindly obey. All we need to do is make ourselves available to Jesus. All we need to do is say "Yes, I'll go out into the deep water and I'll drop my nets again."

Only God knows what we'll catch when we do!

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.