

February 6, 2022

The 5th Sunday after the Epiphany

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Have you ever found yourself about to embark on something brand new — something that in one breath is exciting and thrilling, and in the next so daunting that it paralyzes you?

A colleague of mine called a few days ago to share that it would be announced this weekend that she would be leaving the church where she has served for four years as the Associate Rector to begin serving at a new congregation as their Priest in Charge. My response for her was joy. Joy for this next step in her ministry, for this new beginning. I have always seen in her beautiful gifts of presence, compassion, and a solid theological wisdom, and I could easily imagine her doing well in her new call.

But when I asked how she was feeling about it, I heard in her voice some anxiety that suggested that as much as she was hopeful and wanted to be open to this new call, she also was feeling insecure and a little uncertain about what lay ahead. She wondered, “Would she really be able to do what God was asking of her?”

Echoed in the words of today's scriptures we hear similar sentiments from Isaiah and Peter. “I'm not very good at this, I've never done anything like this before, and I don't think I have what it takes.” Into the ordinary moments of their lives, God has come, in most extraordinary ways, calling them forward.

Coming to Isaiah in a vision, phenomenal six-winged creatures with faces hidden call out to one another God's praises, saying, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord; the whole earth is full of his glory!” Awe-struck and overwhelmed, Isaiah struggles to make meaning. “Woe is me”, he says, for how is it that he, a mere mortal of little consequence, a self-proclaimed man of unclean lips, has come to witness such glorious things. He can only see his inadequacies, where he falls short. But God sees him. And with the touch of hot coal upon his lips, all he believes to be lacking in himself gets erased and what remains is a faithful human being whom God loves, and who loves God. In the absence of doubt and self-critique, Isaiah is now poised to respond to God's calling with an enthusiastic and hopeful, “Here am I; send me!”

Simon and Jesus have already become acquainted. Earlier in Luke, we're told how Jesus came to Simon's home after leaving the temple on the Sabbath, and finding Simon's mother-in-law ill with a fever, He heals her. Can you imagine witnessing this? And Now, Jesus has come to the shore of the lake, He steps into Simon's boat and asks him to take him out on the water.

After teaching, Jesus then directs Simon, “Go out a little further, where it's deeper; and cast your net.” We might imagine that Simon heard Jesus' suggestion as an exercise in futility. After a long night of unsuccessful fishing, Simon doesn't hold out any hope. In fact, he's pretty sure nothing will come of his efforts. Still, though, he casts his nets. And then, Fish!, Fish and More Fish! Out of the depths of the lake, and the depths of Simon's doubts about himself, his abilities and what might or might not be possible, God's abundance overflows, and he is overwhelmed.

We may not be able to imagine God breaking in to our lives the way God did with Isaiah and Simon. Still, in the movements and rhythms of our everyday lives, God is with us, and invites us, just like Simon and Isaiah, to go deeper — deeper into a more intimate relationship, one that not only thrives on trust, communication, listening, and love, but one that feeds us, giving us what we need to go forward in our lives.

How do we go deeper?

One possibility is that we begin by making Spiritual Practices part of our everyday lives. When we read, study and explore SCRIPTURE, we find in God's words the guidance and encouragement we need to imagine new things; to stretch and grow, to risk making a change, or to risk making amends. When we take time regularly to PRAY, we become accustomed to sharing with God all that is in and on our hearts. Without concern, God invites us to name our fears and doubts, our anger and resentments, as well as our praise, gratitude, hopes and dreams. In prayer, we can ask and receive forgiveness — for ourselves and for others. Whether through the Church of England's Soultime App, the 5-minute daily prayer and gratitude journal of the Sanctuary App, the Episcopal Church's online daily office, or the Jesuit's Pray as You Go Podcast, daily PRAYER, meditation, and stillness is just a click away. Walks in nature, or around our Labyrinth can also help us to quiet our inner voices, so that we may begin to hear God's voice — the voice that asks, who will I send? The voice that says to us, do not be afraid. It is God's voice that calls to us, and reassures us with the words we most need to hear, especially when we feel unsure.

Another way we can go deeper is inside of community. St. Dunstan's offers several invitations:

At 9 am Sunday mornings, our Book Group gathers for rich conversation as they explore their faith and ponder together what God might be saying to them. Monday Compline, offered on Zoom at 5:30 pm is a sacred space for 20 minutes of evening prayer, while our Wednesday Eucharist & Prayer Shawl Ministry are mid-week touchpoints. And, in just a few weeks, beginning on Wednesday, March 9th, all are invited to gather for our weekly Lenten Soup Supper in the Parish Hall, a time to share a meal, rich conversation and have the opportunity to explore for ourselves the meaning of Lent. Each of these invitations, whether individual or collective, can help us deepen our spiritual practices and our relationship with God and one another.

With the simple words, "Do Not Be Afraid," Jesus reassured Simon, and us, that we are not alone; that we can trust in and count on God, and that with God, all things are possible, more than we can imagine.

Isaiah's response to God's invitation was, Here I am! Simon's was to drop his nets and to follow. How might we lean in? How might we let go of our doubts and fears, so that we can hear and trust what God is saying to us? How might God be calling us to go deeper?