

SERMON  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany – Lectionary 5  
February 7, 2010

Isaiah 6:1-8  
Psalm 138  
1 Corinthians 15:1-11  
Luke 5:1-11

Brothers and sisters in Christ, grace to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, who is the Christ. Amen.

The author William Arthur Ward wrote the following entitled, “To Risk”:

“To laugh is to risk appearing the fool. To weep is to risk appearing sentimental. To reach out for another is to risk involvement. To expose feelings is to risk exposing our true self. To place our ideas – our dreams before a crowd is to risk loss. To love is to risk not being loved in return. To live is to risk dying. To hope is to risk despair. To try at all is to risk failure.

But to risk, we must, because the greatest danger in life is to risk nothing. For the one who risks nothing does nothing, has nothing, is nothing.

He may avoid suffering and sorrow, but he cannot learn, feel, change, grow or live. Chained by his servitude, he is a slave who has forfeited all freedom. For only a person who risks, is truly free.”

Both our Old Testament story and our Gospel story today talk about taking risks. First we hear the story of Isaiah. Isaiah had a vision while he was in the temple. In that vision, he saw himself in the presence of God. Try and imagine:

Isaiah saw God sitting on his throne while Seraphs (angels) were flying above praising God by saying, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.” If you recall, these are the words we sing during the Holy Communion liturgy.

In the presence of God – in the awe of the majesty, the wonder of almighty God, Isaiah had only one response. He cried from the depth of his soul. He cried from the brokenness of his spirit. He cried from the uttermost part of his being.

“Woe is me!” he cries, “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!”

Imagine that. In the presence of almighty God – in the wonder, in the might, in the holiness, in the righteousness of God, all Isaiah could express was his own sinfulness.

Then one of the seraphs takes a burning coal with tongs from the altar of God and touches the lips of Isaiah declaring; “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.”

Notice the response of God to the sinfulness of Isaiah. It is God who acts. God is moved by Isaiah’s cry and responds by cleansing Isaiah of his sin. God doesn’t tell Isaiah to just get his act together. He doesn’t send Isaiah away from his presence and condemn him.

Instead, God, out of the depths of his love and grace, responds by making Isaiah clean. God frees Isaiah from the torment of his sin – released Isaiah from the guilt of his sinfulness. Imagine, could you be Isaiah in this story? Could God do this for you?

Then notice what happens next. God needs someone who will bring a message to his people. And listen to Isaiah’s response. Isaiah says: “Here am I; send me!” “God, let me do that for you. Let me be your spokesman to your people. Let me God. I can do it with your help.”

You see, after Isaiah has been touched by God – after Isaiah has been cleansed by God – after God has acted in Isaiah’s life. Then, and only then, is Isaiah free to serve. For Isaiah has been freed from his bonds of sin. Therefore, he can now say to God: “Here am I; send me!” Isaiah has a mission. He now has purpose in life.

How many of us go through life with no mission or no purpose? We just plod along day to day. We have no passion in our lives. We have no sense that God is calling us to do amazing things.

I see this so often when I talk with people. There are many people today that have no vision, no passion, therefore no purpose.

The phrase I hear most these days, especially among young people, is, “I’m bored.” I call it the dreaded “B” word. I get the feeling that when people say “I’m bored,” that it is somehow up to me to entertain them.

But entertainment only goes so far. We can only watch so much TV, go to so many movies, listen to so much music, shop in so many stores, play so many video games, attend so many sporting events. Sometimes, we try even more damaging things to “spice up” our lives.

Gambling has become a growing past-time. Pornography is a multi-billion dollar a year industry. Illicit drug use is more and more common. Personal bankruptcy from overspending has devastated families. All of this, thinking that it will add some excitement to our lives.

However, sooner or later, it will all become boring. You see, the cure for boredom is not more entertainment. It’s not the accumulation of more stuff. Rather it is discovering who God has called us to be and what God has called us to do. It’s finding purpose in life.

But that's kind of scary, isn't it? What if God wants us to do something that we don't want to do? Giving ourselves over to God's will is risky business. For what if God takes us out of our comfort zone? It's much easier to continue to live a boring life with no vision, no passion, and no purpose. However, God is calling all of us to a better way.

In our Gospel story today, Jesus calls Peter to leave his comfort zone. He tells him to take his boat out into the deeper water. What is it like in the deeper water? It is more scary. It is more unstable and unfamiliar. But it is also where there are more fish. It's hard to catch fish from shore.

Fishermen often have to go out into the deep water to catch larger and more fish. At least that's the argument I use when trying to convince my wife that I need to buy a boat.

Likewise, Jesus is calling you and me to leave our comfortable shoreline to go to a deeper place where we will find more food for our souls. And also, where we will be forced to depend totally on him.

“But how do we recognize God's calling?” we might ask. Well, perhaps it can come to us during a crisis period in our lives. Maybe it comes to us as a constant intense yearning. Or even God's calling can come to us in a vision like it did to Isaiah.

For all of a sudden, we are drifting away from the perceived stability of life into a place that is more mysterious and where we can't see the bottom.

You see, Jesus never promises us that we will always be able to live in our comfort zone. Life happens. And sometimes, things that happen turn our world upside down. What we thought was once so clear is no longer so black and white.

But this is one of the things that we cherish as Lutheran Christians. We don't claim to have all of the answers. We realize that things are not always black and white.

Sometimes we are forced to live in the grayness of life. Sometimes we are forced to re-evaluate how God is calling us to respond to life situations.

But again, that's scary, isn't it? Wouldn't it be so much easier if everything was black and white, right and wrong, cut and dried, all packaged up in a neat little box? But then, why would we need God's guidance? When would we need to call out to him in our struggles and confusion?

You see, the wonderful thing is, is that sometimes God takes us into the grayness of life, using such situations to take us further out into a deeper relationship with him.

And the comforting thing for us to know is that even though we don't know exactly where the boat is going, we know that Jesus is sitting in the boat with us. And to know that the captain of the boat is with us is very comforting when we don't know where we are going.

In fact, the journey to deeper water is always to help us to grow in our relationship with our Lord. Deeper water is where more faith is required – where we cannot rely on previous experiences, where more is at stake, where more is unknown.

But God is there with us. And in that deeper water God is telling us to let down the nets for a bigger catch. It is risky. But remember what I quoted earlier. “The one who risks nothing does nothing, has nothing, is nothing.”

So here we have two ordinary people, Isaiah and Peter. They are minding their own business going through life without a vision, without passion, and without a purpose.

And the Lord comes to them and changes all of that. And the first thing that both of them did is fall to the ground and admit their utter sinfulness.

So what happens when we encounter God? It does happen you know. We just have to open our eyes and our hearts. When we encounter God, are we like Isaiah and Peter? Do we cry from the depth of our being for God to be merciful to us, the lost and sinful beings that we are?

For until we can cry from the depth of our soul in the presence of God as Isaiah did; until we can be really honest with ourselves about our state of utter lostness; we will never fully appreciate the gift of salvation that Jesus brought to us.

As we gather together to hear God's word and share in the body and blood of our Lord, God hears our cries. And it is here that God will touch us and make us new. God hears the cries of the lost, and he answers with his voice of forgiveness, with his touch of love.

It's like the story of a small girl who was a little over 3 years old. She and her father went to the amusement park. They went into the house of mirrors where she didn't listen to her father's instructions.

He had told her to hang onto his hand at all times. Well, she let go and eventually got separated from her dad and began to cry. She was lost, frightened and couldn't find her way out of the mirror maze. Finally, she heard her daddy calling; "Don't cry, honey. Put your hands out and reach all around. You'll find the door. Just follow my voice."

As he spoke, the little girl became calm and soon found her way out and ran into the waiting arms of her father."

God's voice – his touch is waiting here for us, to lead us out of the maze of life; to lead us out of boredom and apathy. He is offering us a vision, a purpose, a chance to feel passionate again.

To God's call, Isaiah responded by being God's messenger – God's prophet to the people of Israel. Peter responded to Jesus by leaving his job as a fisherman to catch people for Jesus. What will we do?

Maybe we won't do anything. Maybe we are totally content with the way things are. God does give us that option.

But then again, maybe there is this small flame burning inside us. We sense it is God. Maybe we are willing to take the risk. Instead of snuffing out the flame, we let it burn. We let it increase to see where it will lead us.

Maybe we will allow ourselves to enter the mystery of the unknown – the grayness of life. Perhaps we will take a risk and trust that God will be there for us. God will lead us out into the deeper waters. For this is what we call the freedom of the Gospel. We are free because we have let God take charge.

It is my hope and prayer that together, we can see through Isaiah and Peter, the freedom of the Gospel. The freedom to dare to respond to God's call in our lives. The freedom to respond to God's love using our unique talents and God given gifts.

It is my hope and prayer that God excites us and touches our hearts today. And that we will choose to risk all, allowing God to bring passion and purpose into our lives. Then we, like Isaiah, can say; "Here am I Lord; send me." Amen.

May the peace that passes all understanding be with you now and for life everlasting.  
Amen.