

5th Sunday after the Epiphany

Judges 6:11-24a

Psalm 85

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Luke 5:1-11

February 4, 2007

Open my mouth to speak Your Word, Open our ears to hear Your Word, Embolden our lives to live Your Word. Amen.

Tell children's story from 1 Cor 15:1-11. About sharing the Good News.

The epistle for today, which we just talked about, is one of the epistle texts for Easter Sunday in Year B, of the Revised Common Lectionary. It has a genuine Easter message and flavor to it. Seems odd we should encounter it here in Epiphany season, but then we all know that each Sunday is a celebration of the Easter faith. We really acknowledge that in Lent which is coming soon, because it's kind of like a day off for good behavior. But more to the point remember that Epiphany is all about discovery, light, the finding of the Christ child, the reminder that we so often need, in the midst of our stress on human agency and initiative, of the dramatic initiative God takes in confronting us with the claims of the Gospel, the Good News of the Incarnation and of the death and resurrection of our Lord. That the Word of God precedes us and comes from beyond us, WE can ONLY receive it and in turn transmit it to others. ONLY God sees fit to give it to us in the first place. It reminds us of who we are and whose we are.

The central core of this is that the disciples did not discover the Easter faith; it was revealed to them. It came to them from without, not from within, and it continues to be revealed past the Assumption to the time of Paul, and it continues through the ages to all of us who die to ourselves and our "power" and are raised up in the joy of the Easter proclamation. The Easter faith creates disciples; disciples DO NOT create the Easter faith!

This too is the message of our gospel lesson – that we are gifted by God, we are not in charge. Paul sees the risen Lord, realizes he is unfit to be called an apostle because he had persecuted the church, BUT by God's grace he works harder than the others. Apostles in Paul are confined only to the "twelve" but include many other witnesses to the resurrection and sharers of that good news. As we shall see Peter is made abundantly aware of the power and knowledge of Christ, and of his sinfulness.

So, let's see how this plays out in our Gospel lesson. This morning's reading presents us with an interesting contrast to the Gospel we heard last Sun. Just a quick instant replay of last

Sunday's gospel, lest you forgot, and hey, we'll get plenty of instant replays in tonight's Super Bowl, so why not here? Last week we heard Jesus in his home town of Nazareth, teaching, and although he had come with good reviews, and was at first praised, by the end of his message proclaiming a gospel of total inclusiveness and because he would do no signs he was driven out of town with the intent to hurl him off the cliff to his death. It was kind of a 30 second pilot show of what his life was to be, but for the moment he managed to pass through the crowds and go on his way.

Between last Sunday's Gospel and this morning's are some 14 verses which allow for the turn around in attitude. That passage came almost right before this one, but the 14 verses that come between the two readings reaffirm the authority with which Jesus spoke and taught. Once again Jesus is able to heal, to drive demons and to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God.

In fact he did so well, that in the time leading up to this morning's Gospel, he was trying to get away from the crowds just to be alone. They would not let him be, they wanted to hold him there with them (hmmm maybe a preview of the reaction of the disciples at the Ascension, when they did not want Him to leave). Hey, maybe it's not all that different from the other crowd which would have liked to have kept his mighty works for themselves alone. But he refused to allow them to hold him back and went on about his travels.

So here we encounter Jesus, by the lake of Gennesaret. (This is the only place in the New Testament where it is called that). Gennesaret is an adjacent territory just south of Capernaum where he had just been. The crowds had followed him and he was still trying to avoid being swamped the crowds. He spotted the boats, Simon Peter and his partners, the Zebedee boys James and John were washing their nets after a total bust of fishing, and they weren't in it for the fun of it, this was their livelihood. Jesus probably already knew Simon Peter – he'd healed his mother-in-law in the interim – so he jumped on board the boat and asked them to go out so that the crowds could not wade in after him Jesus then sat and taught the crowds. After which he told them to go out further, into really deep water and let down their nets for a catch.

Now these guys were professional fishermen and here was this itinerant teacher, a carpenter from land-locked Nazareth telling them how to do their job. I suspect there are a good many fisher folk here who also know that fishing isn't real good in the heat of the noon day sun. But then, after asking Jesus if he knew what he was asking, they yielded to his authority, died to

themselves and WOW! What a haul. It was overwhelming! How much better an ending that all that messiness and unpleasantness of last Sunday.

Jesus seemed to have moved from near death and stoning, from failure and scarcity, to life and to triumph. There was an abundance of fish where the night before there had been none. And that can be pretty mind boggling.

No wonder Peter was so awestruck. True to form Peter's reaction to all of this abundance producing power was what? Get out of here!! Leave me be! Go away from me; I'm a sinner!" It IS always overwhelming when we think we know how to do something; that WE are in charge, that WE are the experts, that we create the Gospel, that it is our handiwork, our possession, and we will do it our way, even if it doesn't work and suddenly here comes Jesus right up to us and tells us what to do. IF we are willing to listen and to obey, to die to ourselves and do as God commands us, The abundance we are given is without end – much like that wine at the wedding at Cana that never ran out, and the best was saved for last! Like those seven loaves and five fish that somehow fed thousands with food left over! Like the Eucharistic feast we are about to share in.

Recently I have been moved to risk much, to toss my net off the boat into the deepest waters, to change my life and my directions: to die to my life of comfort and security and to be open to what God has for me to do. In short I have left my job at HospiceCare. This was not a planned change in my life, but because of the peace that has settled in on me, and on the grace and strength and abundance I am finding day by day as I open my heart and my life to the power and direction of the Holy Spirit. I feel as though I have been given new life and truly believe that God has called me to this place. Like Peter, James and John in our Gospel story, I don't have a clue where God will lead me, or what God will lead me to, but like those disciples I hear Jesus saying to me, "Do not be afraid". I hear Jesus telling me that I just need to cast my nets where He shows me and I will have an abundance of what I need. Like Isaiah when called I am responding, "Here I am, Send me."

It works for churches as well. Last November I remember standing in this very spot and sharing with you a fable about some warm fuzzies, hopefully that is not all you remember of that day, but if it is it's a good start. Remember they had to risk giving away their fuzzies and risk that they would never run out. But, more than that, I shared with you the story from 1st Kings that was referred to in last Sunday's Gospel – the story of Elijah being sent to a widow in Zarephath

in Sidon, not a Jew, not one of the “chosen”, but one God chose (God tends to pick some of the least likely, Paul?) to provide oil and grain enough for Elijah, the widow, her son and their entire household so that they could eat in the midst of drought for as long as it took. I talked to you about letting go. Leaving what’s known and comfortable. Warren talked to you about the Widow’s mite, or penny. In fact, gave us each a penny. Yeah, it was stewardship time, but as I remember the talk around Trinity was pretty dismal Eyeore was definitely in charge. There was talk of closing Ortmeier, not being able to meet our bills for the roof, and who knows what all else. Things with the building kept “falling apart” or leaking. We turned away ministries because we didn’t think we could afford to keep a building open. We certainly weren’t catching very many fish.

During the week following that message, we got a letter from Father Bob about a special meeting to be held on the first Sunday in Dec. (Advent 1, the start of the new Liturgical year, a season of watchfulness and anticipation) In that letter were 10 options, very few of which held out much hope or promise, there was little vision and less hope, Eyeore was there. The last one struck me as being the most faithful to our call to discipleship and risk – to re-call old and attract new members -- in short -- to go fishing. Not like “Guys on Ice” either, but for people. Jesus said to Peter, “Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching people.” I remember that letter and my response. I believe I said something about needing vision and hope, to look ahead, not behind.

I was not able to be at that meeting, but suddenly that letter must have been the call to cast our nets off the other side of the boat – even if it is the middle of the winter and we’d have to heat Ortmeier (we would have had to do so in a limited way anyhow). And look now where we are and what the talk is about.

We cast our net and we are catching fish! Two weeks ago we kicked off a city wide youth ministry program. We opened Ortmeier hall, and our hearts and prayers, to some 50 young people, from High school age through mid-20’s for a “coffee house”. There was music and people from all around the city enjoying fellowship with one another. Kudos to Lora Cowell and Andrew Holdorf for their vision, their courage, and their willingness to help the rest of us see to drop the net, to do as God was calling, to give up needing to know exactly where everything was coming from and having control and letting Jesus fill our nets. Last Sunday, at

our Annual Meeting we were presented with a balanced budget. There were signs of hope and faith in that room at Ortmeyer, which is still open.

So here we are where the disciples were. Amazed and astounded with fish in our net. BUT the story is not over, it has only begun. Remember that when Peter reacted in astonishment saying – “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man” Jesus said to him “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people” Jesus is saying that to us, here today, right now. Are we willing, as the disciples were, to bring our boats ashore, leave everything and follow him?

Lord,
I'm at the end
Of all my resources.

Child
You're just at the
beginning
of Mine.

~Ruth Harms Calkan.