

“I give thanks to you, O Lord,
with my whole heart; before the gods,
I sing your praise.” AMEN!

“Before the gods, I sing your praise.”

We all have those little “g” gods.

Money, car, affluence and notoriety -
to just name a few of the things
which that humans.

Today, as we open the sermon
I just wanted to take a moment to notice
that opening prayer:

“We give thanks to you, O Lord,
with our whole heart;
before the (money, cars, affluence,
and notoriety), we sing your praise.”

I read a story during my sermon study this week
that was retold by Pastor Dale Casey.

He got it from Rabbi Joseph Telushkin.

The story's about a man who had
some very fine fabric.

He took it to the tailor with the order to have
the tailor make him a pair of pants.

The man returned after a week,
but the pants weren't ready.

Two weeks go by and still the pants were not finished.

Finally, after six weeks, the pants are ready.

The man tried them on and they fit perfectly.

Length, waist, seams -
everything was in his words, "Exquisite."

When the man reached for
his wallet to pay the tailor, he said,

"It took God six days of work to create the world.
It took you six weeks to create
just one pair of pants."

The tailor smiled and said,
"Yes, but look at the pair of pants, and
then look at the world!" (Pause)

It's quite sad to not need to look very far to know
that the fragile world is rotating

on a dangerous axis.

We are reminded everyday of the way humans
waste and and hoard resources.

We see our imperfections and failures
to reject the little “g” gods in our lives.

All the while, we have national leaders who
are behaving in ways that promote
selfishness and greed.

It has trickled down to what we
call the “Me-first movement.”

Selfishness and greed have become a
cursed value with a firm hold on us.

Troubling that some of the worst behaving
people are ones who call themselves Christian.

And it is into this world, and unto these people,
who live in a world of sin, spiritual blindness,
and poverty from oppression
that Jesus came to announce
gospel news.

Right in the midst of us,
Jesus showed (and shows) up.

Remember his first public teaching
reported in Luke was that sermon that
almost got him hurled off a cliff.

When he said, “The Spirit of the Lord
has anointed me to bring good news to the poor,
release of the oppressed, and sight
to the blind,”

he clearly stated his purpose for being here
and it almost got him killed by the people
he grew up with.

Of course, we know his purpose eventually did
get him killed by the government,
religious leaders, and a mob crowd.

That’s what happens when God deals
with an imperfect world.

God knows that it is only redemption from God
that will save it and it was done by Jesus.

So, since we know the redeemed part
is taken care of, we get stuck here because
we don’t know how to answer the,
“then what?” question.

Some do know.

Those listening today and attending congregations
that preach and follow Jesus know.

You see, part of the “then what” is what
we are doing here today.

Talking about it, singing about it,
praying about it, meeting together.

It’s something, for sure.

But, then what?

All of our lessons today address the “then what?”

Before, during, and after the talking,
singing, and praying about it
we are given the “then what,” answer.

In Isaiah, we have another call story for a prophet.

We, like Isaiah, are dumbfounded about
being in the presence of the Lord in
the throne room with flying snakes
that circle around God.

That’s what seraphs are: winged snakes that bite

with a venom that burns.

These beings are the ones who called out
to one another, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the
Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of
his glory.”

Their calls, so loud, that the whole place
vibrated and shook.

The whole place was filled with smoke and
Isaiah thought he’s about to die.

No one sees God and lives to tell about it. (Pause)

It’s kinda funny that we simply rush
to the end and celebrate the “Here I am,
send me.”

I’ve sure done that without considering what it is
that God called him to do.

Which was to proclaim judgment upon the Israelites
through the destruction of the Syrians until
they were grounded down to nothing
but a stump.

After that, and only after that, will Isaiah
be called to bring a message of hope.

When I imagine such an event occurring in my life,
I think I'd have probably said,
"Here I am; send someone else!" (Pause)

That's the humble part of me, that says that.

The confident part takes more the answer
that Isaiah eventually gave, but we are called
to balance the humble and
the confident natures when
we ask ourselves,

"What is it like to truly follow Jesus?"

What is it like to be called to stand in the
presence of what is most beautiful and holy
while at the same time intensely terrifying?

Do we have to be reminded of the poisonous,
flying snakes? (Pause)

This takes us to the gospel and these events
we read about on fishing boats.

Anyone here a good fisherman/woman/people?

My dad was a good fisherman.

I recall him saying to me on a few occasions
while fishing.

“Try not to talk so much, Tommy.
You’ll scare the fish!”

The words would travel so well over the water
their vibrations would even enter into the water
and scare the fish away from being
caught.

I wonder, how many people are scared away
from following Jesus because so many
preachers and teachers talk too much!

Their talking too much has led to lessons,
instructions, and judgments that
actually counter Jesus’ teaching.

We try to use so many words to convey
a meaning instead of keeping it as
simple as possible.

We waste time and energy
dividing who’s in and who’s out?

How many lives are distracted with useless
questions like who needs saving and
who is beyond it? (Pause)

I'm intrigued by the truth, that preachers
should simply tell of the God,
people already know.

That when we receive the non-judgmental good news,
that Paul gave in the epistle reading today,
we know it is the backbone of our faith.

That we, received the news that Christ died
for us because God loved the world and
then we pass that on to others,

and to be persistent in sharing with people
the tremendous loving mercy of God,
who drove that love and mercy home
even unto the grave.

But, then was raised on the third day.

With this message, we keep in mind that, like Paul,
and all of humanity for that matter,
we were unworthy of such love and mercy,
but it came nonetheless.

We proclaim that with confidence!

This news, as simple as that, is what we pass down.

That's what we do.

How does what we do, and what we know,
affect how we respond to the division today?

Answer, it leads us to rise up, follow Jesus,
and let our behavior catch people off guard.

“Preach the gospel at all times,
use words if necessary.” (St. Francis)

Think of the way the other fishermen,
the other townspeople

who now had a great catch to eat and sell
were themselves “caught” when
Peter encountered such a catch that
he fell down at Jesus’ knees saying,

“Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man.”

Everyone was seized with amazement, but
it was only Peter who grasped what it all
meant and in whose divine presence he knelt.

Then, Jesus said, “Do not be afraid!”

The angelic pronouncement from God
when human beings encounter the divine,

is always - Do not be afraid.

With those words from Jesus,
Peter, James, and John left their
lives to follow God. (Pause)

Being caught by God transforms a person's life.

When the holy breaks into
the mundane things of life,
we are moved.

We might think, like Peter and Isaiah and Paul
that we are too imperfect to call,
but that's when you know it's exactly
God's call.

After all, the people who are smug and
overly confident confident,
and totally secure with God's call are

the ones we need to be on guard with
because they're following their own agenda

and likely not pursuing what is most healthy
for the whole body of Christ.

The only one whom God can use to "catch people"
is the one who holds humility in one hand,

and confidence in the other.

Not just any confidence, but confidence
in the gospel which brings
redemption to all people.

AMEN!