

# Homily 2/9/25 The Amazing Catch

Help us to cast our nets wide and to be open to the abundance that you have in store for us. May we always be willing to follow your lead and to trust in your plan for our lives. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Good morning.

Sometimes it is very hard to see a common thread in the readings on a given Sunday – actually I sometimes don't think there is one – but this Sunday it's easy to see the common threads that runs through all three of them. Each of the readings deals with God's call - God's call to the prophet Isaiah, and Jesus' call to Paul on the road to Damascus and his call to his first disciples.

And, since a call implies a response, these readings are also about unworthiness, repentance and action.

Let's start with Isaiah.

Isaiah was an early prophet living in the 8th century BC. In Isaiah chapter 6 he describes a vision of God in mystical, allegorical language - describing a God, the hem of whose robe filled the temple, and who was surrounded by Seraphs, six-winged creatures, who worshiped Him unceasingly. At that time it was thought that if one was to see the face of God one would die. Isaiah, who feared that he had come too close to God, was so aware of his brokenness and so full of humility that he said "Woe is me! I am lost!" Clearly, God had other plans for Isaiah, and after assuring him that his sins were forgiven, God said "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?". Well, we all heard Isaiah's answer "Here am I; send me!"

Now, it's not entirely clear whether this was the first time that Isaiah was called to be a prophet, or if it was a renewal of his call. The first five chapters of the book of Isaiah relate not directly to Isaiah's ministry but rather contain prophetic descriptions of the sinfulness and immorality of the times, and warnings of what is to come if the people of Judah continue in their evil ways. When Isaiah says "Here am I, send me" he is committing himself to warning the people of Jerusalem of their impending doom if they continue in their sinful ways.

That kind of a prophet is rarely welcomed. Isaiah was well aware of that, but he heard God's call and answered it, and for the remainder of his long life he courageously warned people in high and low positions within the society of the error of their ways, and encouraged them to care for those on the margins – the poor, the widowed, the orphans, the stranger.

In today's second reading in First Corinthians, Paul references the call that he received earlier in his life on the road to Damascus. This is a story that is so well known. Paul was a tax collector and a persecutor of the Christians. He's on his way to Damascus and as Acts 9 describes it he was "breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem." Letters which allowed him to breach the sanctuary of the temple to arrest Christians while at worship and bring them to Jerusalem.

On his way to Damascus, Paul encounters a blinding light, and a voice says to him. "Why do you persecute me" and when Paul asks "Who are you, Lord" the voice replies, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

What follows that encounter is three days of blindness, and a life of seeing the light. Paul believed that he had met the resurrected Jesus, the one who had been killed and then raised, exalted by God. Paul, persecutor of Christians, turns into their staunchest advocate. The description in Acts 9:20 says that "At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God." At once – he answered the call. But in the years that followed this staunch advocate of Jesus Christ continued to be repentant. In today's reading he describes himself, as "the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle", and that he "worked harder than any of the apostles... by the grace of god that is with me."

Now in these two readings both Isaiah and Paul respond to visions – they have a mystical encounter with the supernatural which empowers the call. But the fisherman that Jesus talks to in Luke 5 do not experience a mystical revelation – unless somehow the boat, so full of fish that it was sinking, is a mystical revelation.

These fisherman -Simon Peter (whom we know as Peter) and James and John - already knew Jesus. Indeed, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John the Baptist had said about Jesus and who had followed him. The gospel of John, Chapter 1 tells us "The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus". In the chapters prior to Luke 5 (and in the parallel gospels of Matthew, Mark and John) it becomes clear that these men were already followers of Jesus. They were there at the wedding at Cana, they were at the well where Jesus met the Samaritan woman and when he exorcised the demon from the man in Capernaum. They were there for the healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law, and they were there to listen to Jesus teach in the temple. They knew Jesus before that day on the shore of the lake of Gennesaret.

Now the thing that I always love about the disciples is that they never lose their humanness. After he finished preaching, Jesus told Simon Peter to "Put out into the deep water, and let down your nets for a catch". Now Simon Peter was just a bit skeptical that they would catch anything. He replied "We have worked all night long and we haven't caught anything yet, but then added - "Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.". Was Simon Peter just being polite or did he already realize that Jesus had powers far beyond those of a normal human being and his directions were to be trusted? Or was he perhaps just humoring this carpenter and maybe letting him know how hard and uncertain a fisherman's life was.

Of course we know the story. They caught so many fish that the boat almost sank and they had to ask James and John to help bring in the catch. And Peter Simon, seeing this, fell on his knees, saying "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man." Do these words remind you of Isaiah's words in the first reading "Woe is me! I am lost"

Now, this wasn't a vision, this was just a fishing expedition. There were no Seraphs to fly in and hold a burning coal to Simon Peter's lips. But there was this man, this carpenter, who is suddenly, excitingly and frighteningly so much more. And Jesus said, "Do not be afraid; from now on, you will be catching people. "

What could that be like? These men were devout Jews. They had been following this new rabbi, listening to him teach, seeing the miracles, but what does that mean "catching people"? But before they even had a chance to ask themselves what could that mean, they brought their boats to shore, left everything and followed.

Like Isaiah, like Paul, they turned their lives completely around, upside down. We imagine they had families - we know that at least Simon Peter had a mother-in-law. They left them behind to travel with Jesus, to listen to him preach, witness his miracles, to be there to the very end. They answered his call.

But what does this call look like for us? I'm fairly sure that none of us have seen visions of God in his temple attended by seraphs. I doubt many of us have encountered a blinding light followed by the voice of Jesus on our daily walk. But we can hear the invitation of Jesus, "Come follow me". For the disciples on that day it was to become fishers of men and many of us are called to that whether it be in our life's work or in casual conversations in our daily lives.

But I think Jesus' call to us - and to his new disciples on that day -is more than that. It is the same call made by Isaiah and Paul. Throughout his life Isaiah called for caring for those on the margins. In Isaiah 1:17 he says "Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed; defend the orphan, plead for the widow" And Paul in his writing and in his words proclaimed not only the divinity of the risen Christ but also Christ's insistence that our job on earth is not only to magnify the Lord but also to care for the less fortunate around us.

So how do we answer that call? Being here in community at Trinity is a good start. I have spoken before of how meaningful our efforts are to help reduce hunger for the poor and the homeless, to help immigrants who are building a new life here in America, to provide education and medical care for people in Africa and South America.

But our efforts need to extend outside of our church community as well. Do we deal with the people that we interact with every day with love?

Most of you know that my husband has Alzheimer's, and he is in a dementia ward in a nursing home. I've spoken before about the love that the staff – the nurses, the aides, the cleaning people - have for the patients. And I am always humbled at what a ministry these caregivers are called to.

Death is a constant companion on a dementia ward. Last week Ray's roommate passed away. It was sad, but not unexpected. He had been failing. But when I came in the day after his death, an aide took me aside to tell me he had passed. And then she proceeded to share with me with tears in her voice that before he died they were able to wash him and put him in fresh night shirt and tuck him comfortably into his bed. Then an hour later she checked in and he was gone. This was answering a call.

These are deeply divided times we live in, perhaps answering a call is still finding ways to love and talk gently with people with whom you disagree strongly on political and social welfare issues. Or perhaps it is working hard not to demonize those on the other end of the political spectrum but to remember that we all are God's children.

On that day, in Galilee, the day with the amazing catch of fish, the disciples begin a long journey following their leader and Messiah, through three years of ministry, ending with his death on the cross. And their own journeys extended for many years beyond that, many – most of them - dying as martyrs also. But by answering Jesus' call and becoming fishers of men, they were able to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to Jew and Gentile alike in their own time and continuing to this very day.

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