

## Epiphany 5 2022 St. Luke

Today we hear of Isaiah and Peter, ordinary people, people who suddenly find themselves experiencing the presence of the Holy Spirit. For each, their encounter with God's Spirit led to immediate feelings of unworthiness.

Isaiah claimed he was unworthy, that he was a man of unclean lips. Peter asked Jesus to get away from him for he was a sinful person.

Yet both made the decision to respond to the call that they received. Isaiah, despite uncertainty, responds saying, send me. Peter made the choice to give up his life's work to follow Jesus.

I like Peter – he tries so hard. He wants to get it right, yet he struggles. We hear this throughout the Gospels and The Acts of the Apostles. What inspires me is that he keeps at it. He doesn't let things, or himself, stop him from moving forward as a disciple. When he figures out what is wrong with his actions or his thinking, he changes.

Today we hear that Jesus is out on a boat with Peter. Peter, it seems, was tired from fishing all night, and staying awake during the day so Jesus could teach the crowds on the shore. Suddenly, it seems, Jesus tells Peter to put his nets out again. I can just imagine what Peter thought when Jesus told him to go out deeper and cast the nets from the other side of the boat

Jesus, you just don't understand. I'm tired; we are all tired. We have tried and tried and caught nothing. We just want to go home, clean up, eat something and sleep before we go back out again tonight. Peter would be justified don't you think? They had been out all night casting their nets in the water with nothing to show for their efforts other than tiredness and soreness.

Net fishing is hard, exhausting work. I know firsthand. When we were on our second tour in Alaska, friends bought a commercial fish camp. David and I both got commercial fishing licenses so we could go to the island and help them. We would fish at all hours; it all depended on the tide.

We would go out in skiffs, really nothing more than a slightly larger rowboat but with a motor. Two of us for each boat. Each boat would check for fish on many nets.

One person pulled the cork line. The line that floated on the water's surface while the other pulled lead line which meant it was weighted to keep the nets pulled tight down in the water.

My job always was pulling lead line. We would drag the net over the boat and pick out the salmon. It was hard work on many levels. You may not realize that salmon have very sharp teeth that would draw blood even when you are wearing two heavy gloves on each hand. It was even more exhausting when the effort was for naught – all that work for empty nets. I can certainly relate to Peter and the others with their empty nets.

I know if I was told to go back out after just having picked the lines, I would have walked away. So, to me, Peter most likely found Jesus' request just a tad unreasonable. They were tired, they had not slept, and they really did want to get off the water and rest.

But Jesus had other plans for them. And Peter, trusting Jesus, said yes.

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In my mind, Peter would have been justified to walk away. But he didn't. Just as Isaiah said yes to God, Peter and the others did the same. They went out deeper, cast their nets yet again and suddenly there was abundance – so much the boats about sank. I don't know what is worse, no fish or being so filled with fish that one is terrified the boat won't make it back to shore. And just like that, Peter and the others decide to leave everything behind, their livelihood, their families, the security of a life they knew how to live, to follow this man named Jesus.

You and I know that this is not the moment when the followers suddenly get it and follow perfectly. There are many more times that they, including Peter, will stray, will misunderstand, will attempt to mold Jesus into who and what they want him to be.

Following God's call, following our call through our baptism, is not an easy road. Henri Nouwen, in *The Inner Voice of Love*: wrote "It is not going to be easy to listen to God's call. Your insecurity, your self-doubts, and your great need for affirmation make you lose trust [in God's voice at times]" Adding in the noises of the world and culture, make it even harder for me.

I, for one, want to listen and to follow, but I want to drag the boat along just in case I need it again. Can't you just see me dragging an oversized rowboat over the rough places, down into the valleys, over the mountains. It really slows me down, distracts me, and makes the journey even harder. And yet I need that boat because at time's I struggle to trust God.

Isaiah and Peter experienced times of doubt and fear and the desire to stay just as they were. To follow, they each had to wrestle with their resistance, their doubts, and their fears. The result we know. They caught more than they could imagine.

But that was not what was important. What was important is that their ministry was defined. God defining Isaiah's ministry; Jesus defining Peter's and the other disciples' ministry. It is the ministry for all followers then and today. We are to fish for people. We need get out on the boat that is this world and do evangelism. We need to cast out our nets and catch people.

Now I am assuming Jesus was speaking metaphorically. Can't you see yourself carrying a fish net everywhere and throwing it over people? It would make for some exciting reactions I suspect. Instead of literally fishing with nets or bait, we are to fish by sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ and our journey of faith. We are called to be Evangelists, to practice evangelism.

I know most Episcopalians as well as others, hearing the word Evangelism, have a reaction that isn't -- **great I'm all in, let's go for it.** Rather it often is the opposite. **Not me Lord, no way.** We are like Isaiah, protesting our lips aren't made for this. Yet just as Isaiah and Peter said yes to God's call and went to catch people, we are to do the same. We are to tell the story like the old hymn says "I love to tell the story; twill be my theme in glory, to tell the old, old, story of Jesus and his love."

But to do that will require letting go of our backing away from the Big E word instead, claiming it as part of our ministry as disciples here at St. Luke's. We are called to cast out our nets, to tell the story of Jesus Christ, the story of our journey with Jesus and with our faith community.

I want to share something I found on the internet many years ago. Remember the top 10 lists that were popular. Robin Williams even did one on the top 10 reasons to be Episcopalian – yes he was one of us. One on his list was no snake handling.

Anyway, the one I found was on not casting out nets. While this is a bit tongue in cheek there is some truth to what prevents us from casting our nets, from telling others of God's love working in our life. So here it is:

### **TOP TEN EXCUSES FOR NOT CASTING OUT OUR NETS ONCE MORE**

10. That'll never work.
9. I'm tired; I'm sleepy
8. It's too hard.
7. Lord, I need to spend more time at home.
6. Jesus, I need a vacation.
5. We tried that before.
4. What if the nets break?
3. What if the boats sink?
2. I don't know any other boat who would help us.

And the number one reason for not casting out our nets once again...

I don't want to have to deal with a whole boat of smelly fish

I suspect the number one reason might be -- we feel ill prepared, uncomfortable, uncertain, and just perhaps too vulnerable.

Yet God is calling us to do the same as Isaiah and Peter. The waters and paths won't be easy. We will face distractions and temptations. We just might even question God ... doubting God's direction; wanting to cast our net where we want... or perhaps not wanting to cast out at all.

In this time, we are being invited to reflect on where God might be calling us:

to go deeper

to cast out our nets in a new place or new way

to push past fear so that we might join with Isaiah and say, "here I am Lord, send me."

So that we might join with Peter and follow Jesus being molded and formed by the one who is our beloved savior.

So that we will open our lips and share the God News of Jesus Christ.

We need to get to the business of casting out our nets.  
So, in the coming days, where will you cast your net?  
Where will you share the Good News?