

EPIPHANY: CELEBRATING GOD'S GIFT FOR ALL PEOPLE

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

February 7, 2010

Isaiah 6:1-9 [9-13]

Psalm 138

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Luke 5:1-11

Called to Proclaim

We celebrate Epiphany as the season of Christ's revelation to the whole world. It is a time to think about our role in the journey of the Good News as it reaches peoples of all cultures, in all places. Today's lessons pick up that theme.

The Gospel reflects the First Reading; both deal with the idea of "call," God's invitation to step forward and do something for God's mission in the world. We find similarities and differences in the two lessons. One difference is the setting in which God's call came.

Isaiah's call comes to him in the sacred spaces of the Jerusalem Temple. The "year that King Uzziah died" (6:1, *GNT*) can be fixed around 742-740 B.C.E. The Lord speaks to him directly, from his throne surrounded by creatures of the heavenly court. The ground shakes and the room fills with smoke as the heavenly court sings, "Holy, holy, holy" (6:3, *GNT*). Isaiah is profoundly convicted of sin: "There is no hope for me! I am doomed..." (6:5, *GNT*). He is amazed to live, having seen the Lord directly (see Exodus 33:20). Then one of the creatures touches his lips with a burning coal and announces the Good News that "your guilt is gone, and your sins are forgiven" (6:7, *GNT*).

This beautifully illustrates the spiritual cycle of confession and forgiveness, but the story does not end there, as it does for many contemporary Christians. God asks, "Who will be our messenger?" and Isaiah answers, "Send me!" (6:8, *GNT*). To the cycle of confession-forgiveness, Isaiah adds the essential third element: response.

The call comes to Peter and his associates amid the lovely landscape of Lake Galilee's shores. Jesus is teaching the people and gathering crowds. Jesus "borrows" a boat from Simon Peter and moves away from the crowded shoreline so he can sit down in the fashion of rabbis to teach. He is teaching the "word of God" (Luke 5:1, *GNT*), which Luke had earlier noted were words of power that could heal a man with evil spirits (see Luke 4:31-37, especially verse 36). Simon senses the authority of Jesus as he addresses him as "Master" and obeys his strange request. (One might expect that an experienced fisherman would ignore the suggestions of a stranger.) When his obedience yielded the blessing of a rich catch of fish, Simon, like Isaiah, felt surrounded by the divine presence and confessed, "I am a sinful man!" (5:8, *GNT*)

Luke doesn't give us a word of forgiveness, but perhaps the abundant catch pictures this. In any case, when Jesus issues the call to join his mission, Simon, James, and John respond immediately. In earlier stories of God's call -- Moses (Exodus 3) and Gideon (Judges 6) -- the call comes in the midst of daily work, as with Simon, James, and John. Only Isaiah is called while in God's house.

To what tasks are Isaiah and the fishermen called? Isaiah's mission seems most strange to us. God tells him to "Make these people stubborn! Make them stop up their ears, cover their eyes, and fail to understand. Don't let them turn to me and be healed" (6:10, *CEV*). Isaiah is called to dull the minds and ears of the people in order to prepare for God's judgment, which will be nearly total (6:11, 12). Although judgment and destruction will come to the disobedient people, there will be a sign of hope in the remnant: "But just as stumps remain after trees have been cut down, some of my chosen ones will be left" (6:13, *CEV*). The idea of the remnant, survivors of judgment who will carry forward the purified faith, is, for Isaiah, a sign of God's grace (see 1:2-9, especially verse 9).

The mission of the new "fishers of people" is to follow Jesus. To do so, they leave everything behind. In another connection, Jesus explained the cost of following him this way: "If any of you want to be my followers, you must forget about yourself. You must take up your cross each day and follow me" (Luke 9:23, *CEV*). Though the mission of Jesus implies judgment (see John 3:19), it more often accents redemption, deliverance, and healing.

The Second Lesson takes us perhaps 30 years beyond Jesus' mission on earth to a mission that is no longer bound to Jesus' physical presence. He is risen! Paul, and all post-Easter disciples (like you and like me) are called to proclaim the victory of the resurrection, which is the Good News, the gospel of our salvation.

This week's Reflection was prepared by Rev. John S. Kerr, Executive Director of Lutheran Bible Ministries. Visit www.bibleministries.org to learn more about Lutheran Bible Ministries.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Russian Federation – With thanks to God for the successful distribution of Scripture among the general public, Sunday School teachers, and the military, and for God's guidance for translation projects, and with prayers for God's guidance in relations with the Ministry of Justice and for God's blessing on the translation team and for the completion of the Bible in contemporary Russian; **Ukraine** – With thanks to God for the completion of all the documentation required for building Bible House in Kiev, and with prayers for God's blessing upon the start of the building work, and with prayers that the distrust, frustration, and problems in society can be overcome as people are brought to the hope of the Word of God; **Belarus** – With thanks to God that his Word has been proclaimed among so many diverse people from various different backgrounds which has boosted conversions, and with thanks to God for financial support and for opening doors to children's homes, homes for the elderly, rehabilitation centers, museums, and libraries, and with prayers for funds to publish the Bible in Belarusian, and that young drug addicts and people with HIV turn to God.

Activity Corner: “Gone Fishing”

Supplies needed: Bibles; 8-1/2” x 11” construction paper (assorted colors); markers or pens or pencils; fish pattern (approximately 8” x 5”); scissors; basket.

Invite everyone to trace and cut out a fish. On one side, ask each one to write the last part of Luke 5:10 and to fill in their name: Jesus said, “_____ will be catching people.” On the other side, encourage each one to think about something they can do during the week that reflects the love of Jesus to others. Discuss what it means to follow Jesus. Then ask each one to complete the following sentence on the other side of their fish: Jesus is calling me to _____ . Gather all the fish into a basket and pray for God’s guidance and blessing. Conclude by reading Psalm 138, a prayer of thanksgiving and praise.