

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Feb 7th 2016

When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him. Luke 5: 11

The theme of today's readings is that we are loved, healed and sent by God. It's something that takes an entire lifetime to grasp.

First we have to believe: to believe that we are sinners, but eminently loved sinners; to trust that Jesus loves us endlessly, despite our unworthiness. And, to believe that Jesus thought we were worthy enough to die for. Finally, we are asked to understand that we, loved sinners, are sent to do God's work.

In the first reading Isaiah proclaims, "I am a man of unclean lips." Yet he is healed. When God calls out, "Whom shall I send?" Isaiah's healed heart can trustingly respond, "Here I am. Send me!"

In the First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul humbly admits, "I am the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle." Yet he recounts that "by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been ineffective." Paul knows he has been loved, forgiven and now sent on this mission to preach the good news.

The theme continues with Simon Peter, the most fully human apostle we see in the gospels, as he encounters Jesus. Of course Peter has seen and heard Jesus before and believed enough in his power to ask him to heal his mother-in-law, as we saw a few verses earlier in Luke.

Peter had spent a long and discouraging night fishing. As he and his companions returned to shore in the early morning, Jesus, pushed by the crowds, asks Peter to let him teach from his boat. So he and his friends got back in their boats, dragging their washed nets with them. He was grateful to Jesus and could tell he was a good man. Peter sat on the water listening, perhaps idly tying knots in torn spots on the nets. But he was really tired after a fruitless night of fishing. Suddenly Jesus turned to him and suggested he row out to deeper water and lower his nets for fish.

Really?

There was no doubt that Jesus was a holy man who knew about God – but Peter knew fish. It wasn't going to be worthwhile. But he shrugged and rowed out to where Jesus had pointed and dropped his nets.

Instantly, nets that had been empty for hours last night were full, teeming, overflowing with fish. He and Andrew pulled up their nets and waved for John and James to come closer. They laughed and shouted and had never seen such a fill of fish, as their boats sunk lower in the water from the weight of the catch.

Suddenly Peter dropped his nets and fell to his knees, profoundly aware of his doubts and his unworthiness saying, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." With those words, Jesus knows that Peter is ready to be sent, as he responds, "from now on, you will be catching men."

Peter's life changes in an instant as he realizes that Jesus is much more than a holy man. And Peter's life changes because Jesus lets him know that it's ok that he is a sinful man – and that he is loved, healed and needed by God for his work.

And they left everything and they followed him.

So all four humbled, amazed, sinful and loved fishermen left everything. They simply followed. What did they have to leave there on their boats as they climbed ashore to follow him?

Their fears of the future and their preconceptions. Their doubts and their confusion. Their worries about what people would think.

They would not know what was ahead or what they were being called to, but they felt the call in their hearts and they “left everything” to follow Jesus. They were empty of the unworthiness that held them back and empty of their feelings of being unlovable. In that profound, loved emptiness, they followed and waited to see how it would be filled.

Loving Jesus, work that same transformation for this weak, doubtful sinful heart. I so want to trust that you have the power to let me do far more than I can imagine now. Instead of running in fear, I long to let you call me. Take me into deeper water. Show me your love and mercy for me there, and I will be your follower. “Here I am. Send me!”

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