

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany – 2025

Isaiah 6:1-13

1 Corinthians 14:12b-20

Luke 5:1-11

Catastrophe; Isaiah was in a place that he clearly did not belong. Have you ever felt exposed, vulnerable, weak? Isaiah was sure that he was seen for exactly what he was and there was an alarm in his spirit that he could not escape. Sometimes we are told not to compare ourselves to others as this will rob us of peace, rob us of contentment. Sometimes we are incapable of *not* comparing ourselves to others. Some folks enjoy looking in the mirror; for others it is a chore. Some people make looking in the mirror their avocation; others avoid it like the plague. Isaiah had a vision of the throne room of God. Holiness saturated the space. To be in God's presence is to encounter unending power, unsearchable wisdom, but Isaiah was overwhelmed by the divine commodity which God alone possesses and the weight of it surrounded Isaiah. For this sinner, it was catastrophic. God's holiness was seared into Isaiah's mind and at that moment it was a mirror, an unwelcome mirror into Isaiah's severe lack of what God so obviously possessed.

Listen to the emotion; listen to the catastrophe arising in Isaiah's heart. "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" (Isaiah 6:5). The prophet would be touched on the very part of his anatomy that was unclean. A seraph, an angel takes a coal from the altar and touches Isaiah's mouth. Guilt; are you familiar with it? How do you measure yourself, on your own merit, before God's holiness? Have you ever squirmed as the walls of guilt close in to reduce liberty in your spirit? You look into the mirror of God's law and the reflection is a man of unclean lips and worse. And the God of holiness orchestrates a reversal. Atonement; the reversal is the product of atonement. Guilt *has to be* taken away. Not theatrically, not academically, not theoretically – in truth; guilt has to be taken away in truth. But how? Atonement is how. Someone has to pay.

Peter must have been grumpy. Futility doesn't make anyone chipper, and Peter had engaged in a long night of futility. His livelihood depended on catching fish. His family depended on Peter catching fish. Peter was a tempestuous man. I don't know any Hebrew swear words, but Lake Gennesaret likely heard its share that night. Futility; one cast of the nets after another, one expense of effort after another, hour after hour, cast after cast, and futility filled the boat. Morning comes and the grumpy fishermen are washing their nets, one final chore before going home and going to bed. Christ is there. Teaching the people, Christ is there. The people are pressing in on Him. Of course the people are pressing in on Him. They want to hear. Immediately prior to this episode, Luke tells us that Jesus said: "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose" (Luke 4:43). To emphasize the point, Luke adds this line: "And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea" (Luke 4:44). And the next thing you know Jesus is by the lake of Gennesaret, engaging the people with the Word of God, and they are pressing in on Him to hear.

What did they feel? Those people who are pressing in on Jesus to hear – what did they feel? Has God's Word ever brought clarity to your soul? *That's* what they felt. Has God's Word ever

brought light to your soul? *That's* what they felt. Has God's Word brought certainty, brought peace, brought vigor and hope and confidence and purpose and direction to your life? *That's* what they felt. Peter is close enough to listen. In fact, Jesus uses Peter's boat to push off from the shore to project His voice to ensure that His congregation could hear. Peter is listening. Grumpy Peter is listening. With the bitter taste of futility in his mouth, Peter is listening. The Carpenter then says that He's in the mood to go fishing. "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch" (Luke 5:4). How swift was grumpy Peter's reaction? "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!" (Luke 5:5). What was the tone in Peter's voice? Did his eyes flash, was he whining, or was there a cynical laugh in his words (yeah, right! I ain't doing that)? Peter changed his mind. How long did that take? What changed his mind? Have you ever told God "no" and then changed your mind? Yeah? You know how that feels? Each of us is stubborn in our own way, even with God.

Get what Simon says: "But at your word I will let down the nets" (Luke 5:5). Luke is keen to get the Simon's verbiage straight. At your word I will let down the nets. Futility; does Simon expect more of the same? Christ is in the boat, the fisherman's boat. It was work to get out into the deep. Grumpy muscles worked to get out into the deep and down go the nets. A long pause to let them sink, then the repeated exercise from last night is reprised – the fishermen pull the nets in. At that moment, for those men, I imagine everything else in the world faded away. Nets full of fish! Astonishment and joy mingle as newfound strength surges through grumpy muscles. Laughter and exertion and eyes wide with amazement; fishermen shoot glances at each other with the question unspoken but audible: "What is this? Who is this?" It's an epiphany! God's glory is unmistakably manifest on that lake. God's glory is unmistakably in that man. And Peter looks in the mirror. It hurts but Peter can't avoid it; he looks in the mirror and sees himself in relation to this man who is so clearly God. Peter is transposed over Isaiah. There are different words coming out of Peter's mouth but the sense is the same: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8).

Have you ever felt like you don't belong? Sin does that. It's not a great feeling. Fig leaves don't allow us to stay in Eden. Do you belong here? What kind of a place do you think this is? I'm sort of partial to what Jacob said when he awoke from a dream about a ladder to heaven: "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Genesis 28:16-17). You belong here, and there is just one reason for that: Jesus Christ has atoned for your sin. God the Father asked: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (Isaiah 6:8). It was the Son of God who said "Here am I! Send me." "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). His glory was unleashed on a cross. Blood and suffering to redeem us from sin and death; His glory was unleashed for you. You belong because Christ died. He bore your sin and took it away into His death; you belong. You belong to God. You belong to Christ. You belong to Christ's church. The Holy Spirit has breathed Christ's life into you. You are a new man, a new woman. Christ's righteousness defines you. Resurrection defines you. You belong. He bore your guilt and He has given you His holiness.

Jesus absolved Peter but it was more than an absolution. That miraculous catch of fish was more than an epiphany of divine authority. Right now, you're in a boat. This holy house, Christ's

church, is the ark of Christendom. The net of the Gospel has claimed you and brought you out of the sea of humanity and into Christ's boat, Christ's church. The fish, that great catch of fish, is an emblem of believers, brought into the church through the preaching of Christ crucified and risen. Jesus is the fisherman par excellence. The miracle depicts the NT ministry and that ministry has claimed you. In God's holy presence, you belong. Clarity in your soul comes from the Word of Christ. Light in your soul comes from the Word of Christ. The Word of Christ carries the atonement within it; you belong. We press in on Him to hear of our Father, to hear of God's grace, to hear of our redemption and vigor and hope and peace and purpose and direction is the product in our lives. This Divine Service is the opposite of futility. Jesus said to Simon: "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men" (Luke 5:10). It has been happening ever since. To the great joy of all believers, it has been happening ever since.