

**5 Epiphany, Yr C**  
Isaiah 6:1-13

**February 10, 2019**  
1 Corinthians 15:1-11

**Trinity Cathedral**  
Luke 5:1-11

*Come as you are*

The familiar story we hear in Luke's gospel reveals another miracle Jesus uses, as in everything he does, to show the splendor of God's glory. Here we find Peter and his friends who have labored all night, doing their best for a good catch. Yet they have caught nothing.

Imagine how weary and discouraged they are. They are doubtful their results will be better when Jesus tells them to let down their nets again into deep water. What *was* it about Jesus that was so compelling, so irresistible, that they did as he asked – even though they didn't know anything about how their work would turn out?

The disciples who dropped everything to follow Jesus fished for their livelihood, to provide food for others. Most of us don't need to do that. Some of you may know a great deal about how to fish. We might fish as a pleasurable way to get away from stress, endless commitments, and regular work.

I fished only once. I was ten years old when my parents decided it would be fun to go fishing as a family.

The only problem was that the day they chose was an ordinary school day. I remember pointing out that fishing would not be considered an acceptable excuse to miss school. I was told we would make up a better excuse. Probably, as a 10-yr-old would do, I said, "Like *what?*"

But when it came time to lie at school by turning in the less than truthful handwritten note from home, I couldn't do it. I said, "What I really did when I was gone was...I went fishing."

To my surprise, the real excuse sounded too ridiculous for the adults to believe, so they trusted the story provided by adults, instead.

I tell this "fish tale" now because my experience then bears an uncomfortable truth. In last Sunday's reading from the prophet Jeremiah, we heard his words "Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." The boy Jeremiah doesn't believe he possibly could be called as a prophet, or taken seriously. He's only a child.

It is too easy to dismiss children, those with few years of authority and experience. We need to pay attention to their voices. In a kind of role reversal, they often serve as our teachers: observing, hearing, and knowing things about life with an acute sensibility. Still, it's easy to have doubts about their wisdom and ability. Today's scripture readings give us similar examples.

Both in today's reading from the prophet Isaiah and in the gospel passage, we see Biblical characters who were convinced they did not have what it took to do as God invited them to do. They see themselves as not ready, not good enough.

Picture Isaiah when seraphs, their great wings above him, called to one another in the words we hear each time we celebrate the Holy Eucharist together: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts."

The voice of the Lord calls out, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” and there’s Isaiah, protesting. He’s not good enough, for he is a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips. God knows better. God will give Isaiah what he needs to go forth and speak as a prophet.

Simon Peter, too, is chosen to do God’s work. But his words to Jesus are, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” Peter sees himself as not ready, either. He might wish to obey, but how could God want him – an imperfect fisherman who has just been gob-smacked by the astounding catch of fish now in their nets.

For Peter, the other fishermen, and for all who follow Jesus, perfection does not come in this lifetime. Especially in times when we feel low or vulnerable, on a journey of personal loss, grief, or disappointment, it is easy to think something is wrong with us, to doubt we are the people God will use to bring the kingdom of heaven nearer to others.

It’s at those times, though, when God draws ever nearer. God finds us anyway, despite our self-doubts, all our imperfections, and invites us in.

Notice that something Peter says reveals how he sees Jesus. Earlier, Peter protested that they had already fished all night long. He called Jesus “Master,” more the title of a teacher. Now, having seen the abundance of fish, Peter believes, and calls him “Lord.”

He acknowledges Jesus as the one he now will obey – whether he was ready or not, whether he was good enough or not.

Perhaps some here are familiar with what once were called “Come as you are” parties. Years ago when I received invitations, the plan was that the recipient comes dressed as they were when first seeing the invitation. The fun included kids arriving in rumpled red pajama bottoms, messed up hair and mismatched clothing.

In today’s scripture lessons, Isaiah and Peter are like those who receive “Come as you are” invitations from Jesus. Jesus isn’t asking them to be perfectly groomed, wise, or anything other than who they are, right then.

In the epistle reading, Paul tells the people of Corinth that he is the least of the apostles, unfit because he had persecuted the church of God. It is only by God’s grace that he will go on to spread the gospel.

You and I, like Jeremiah; like Isaiah, Paul, and Peter, may feel we must be wise enough, learned enough, or perfect before we are sent to do God’s work. I want to assure you that you are enough now.

Like Isaiah, there may be times when we tell God, “Here I am, send me,” but our own words get replaced quickly with self-doubt that we ever are ready, or loved, or special enough for God’s choosing and calling us.

God prepared Isaiah to go out and speak; he readied Peter and the disciples to catch fish and people, to spread the gospel far and wide. God prepares us by placing opportunities for prayer and study before us, in a faith community that forms us so that we can grow spiritually and do Christ’s work.

Remember that those weary fishermen let down their nets, obeying the voice of the Lord, though they had no proof that what they did would be good. They were called to work, but it is only by God's grace that what we do will be transformed to bring others to Jesus.

We don't know how our work will go. We don't know how many fish, or how many people we will catch with our gospel nets. We will continue to be called to serve God in the midst of our ordinary lives. It is God who will take our work, and transform it.

One writer for *The Christian Century* recently gave the gift of encouragement for our daily work, saying:

“Cast your nets, write your papers, teach your students, balance financial accounts, design the buildings, pour the concrete, make the lattes, lead the meetings, administer the IVs, answer the phones, sing the arias. Do what you know how to do, and Jesus will use it to draw others into the kingdom of God.”<sup>1</sup>

God is a patient God, never giving up on us – joyfully meeting and calling us with an embracing love and waiting for us, as long as it takes.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Lauren Dow Wegner in “Living by the Word” : (Chicago: The Christian Century; 2019), 18.