

The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany. February 10, 2019

We are in the Season of Epiphany. It is a series of stories that celebrate the revelation of God incarnate, as Jesus Christ. The word Epiphany comes from the Greek word for manifestation. It is a sudden, striking realization.

The scripture readings for this season include the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. In that instance, the entire trinity is bearing witness to Jesus' true nature. He has a Vision of the light of the Holy Spirit and the Father testifies that Jesus is his beloved son in whom he is well pleased.

Jesus reveals his divinity at the Wedding at Cana by changing water into wine.

Isaiah's Epiphany of God is startling. In his vision, he sees God on his throne in Heaven. The hem of God's robe fills the temple. God is surrounded by strange heavenly beings who cry out saying "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts." The threshold of the temple shakes at the sound of their voices and the house is filled with smoke.

Immediately Isaiah is terrified by his encounter with the living God. In the presence of the Holy One, Isaiah can think of nothing but his unworthiness. No one can see God and live! He says "woe is me - I am lost for I am man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips and yet my eyes have seen the King—the Lord of Hosts"

In the presence of God, how would you respond: feelings of guilt because of sin? How does your reaction affect your prayer life or your view of God?

Isaiah is being honest with God about his human condition. I think I would react the same way. The most honest prayer I can think of is the Jesus Prayer of the Eastern Orthodox. Perhaps you familiarize with it. "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy of me a sinner." IT includes who— Jesus, who am I, my expectation of mercy from God.

God heals Isaiah's sinfulness. A seraph takes a live coal from the altar, touches Isaiah's lips with it and says, "Your guilt has departed and your sin has been blotted out." God provided a way for Isaiah to see God and live.

It is after his release from sin that Isaiah receives a call from God. "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?" Isaiah responds, "Here I am, send me." God has made himself available to Isaiah and Isaiah in turn made himself available to God.

In today's reading from I Corinthians, Paul acknowledges his unfitness to be an Apostle because he persecuted the Church. Have you ever felt completely incompetent to do what God was calling you to do?

I have. When I was coming up to final vows, I had a retreat in preparation. During my retreat, I began to have doubts about my worthiness and ability to make vows of poverty, chastity and

obedience for the rest of my life. Was God really calling me to the Religious Life? Why would God call me of all people?

After a lot of reflection and prayer, I came to believe that if God wanted me to be a Sister, God would give me the Grace I needed.

Paul tells the Corinthians “by the Grace of God, I am what I am.” By the Grace of God, Paul preached the Gospel and the Corinthians believed.

In our Gospel reading today, Peter and his fishing partners had a sudden striking realization. He had just spent all night fishing. Moreover, caught nothing. He was on shore washing his nets when Jesus asked him to put them a little way into the lake so that he could teach the crowd on the shore from the boat. Peter may have heard about Jesus’ healing and preaching.

After Jesus finished teaching the crowd, he asked Peter to row into deep water and let down his nets. Peter protested that he had caught nothing previously but reluctantly agreed to try because Jesus asked him to.

When Peter let down his nets, suddenly they were filled to overflowing with fish. The nets were so full that he had to ask James and John, his partners to help him.

Peter had just experienced Jesus as having power over nature — a miracle worker not just a teacher. He, James and John were utterly amazed.

Peter had done nothing to deserve this miracle, he was just doing what he normally did— he fished. Peter recognized Jesus as a holy person and himself as a sinful man. He asked Jesus to go away from him. Jesus was not perturbed. He told Peter not to be afraid, that from now on he would be catching people. Peter, James and John dropped everything and followed Jesus.

So what did Jesus see in Peter? He did not call his disciples because they were brilliant, great business leaders, wealthy or socially prominent. He did not call them to follow him because of their moral perfection.

Jesus saw a man with enough faith to make an effort, who trusted him enough to try again after failure. Peter had the spirit, which would attempt that which seem hopeless. To quote William Barclay “too often we wait because the time is not opportune. If we wait for a perfect set of circumstances, we will never begin at all.”

An Epiphany of God is more common than we think. Look around you. God is revealing himself to us in our daily lives: through the natural world, in our families and friendships and in service to others. When we perceive that God is sharing himself with us, we can respond to him:

- 1) With honesty and availability like Isaiah
- 2) By relying on God’s grace like Paul and...
- 3) Willingness to persevere like Peter.

May God bless all our Epiphanies big and small.