

Epiphany 5C'19
10 February 2019
Luke 5.1-11
St. Luke's Episcopal Church
North Little Rock, Arkansas
The Rev. Carey Stone

O God of perfection, who knows our weaknesses yet sees and wants only the best for us: Grant us grace in all our imperfections, to believe ourselves to be worthy in Jesus, your Son, and reach out in his Name, for your love's sake. Amen.

Have you ever thought you were pretty good at something only to find out you're really not that great? The way we normally figure this out is to be shown up by someone who is much better at it – whatever 'it' may be.

For me the 'it' was playing the trumpet. I had done *pretty well* in band in Jr. high, and although I had never been first chair, I thought I would go ahead and try out for All-Region Band once I got to high school.

When it was time, I stood outside the audition room and I could hear the person inside playing for the judges. I was taken aback by how good, no how great they were – the tempos they were taking things at were so much faster and precise than I had ever managed to pull off in practice – they were making some real music!

When it came my turn to tryout I walked into the room and saw a large sheet that obscured my being able to see the judges and their being able to see me. After hearing such flawless playing, I began to think how below their standard my playing was. In a matter of seconds, I began psyching myself out and thinking to myself, “what’s the use.” When I started to play, I flubbed the opening run, which made me even more nervous which led to my getting lost and having to start again. By the time I finished I was in a ball of humiliation, and if that wasn’t bad enough, as I began to walk out of the room the judges started to laugh at me– I was crushed and felt like putting my trumpet back in its case and never playing again – I definitely felt like a man of ‘unclean lips!’

To a far greater extent that must be how the prophet Isaiah felt when he had his vision of the Lord, high and lifted up: *“Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.”* An angel then took a hot coal off of the altar and touched it to his lips symbolizing the blotting out of

Isaiah's sin and only then was he ready, able, and willing to hear God's call:

*"Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here and I; send me!"*¹

God did not call the equipped, he equipped the one that he called. Because of Isaiah's humility, because he knew that he wasn't worthy, God made him worthy and used him even in his weakness. We often think that we have to have it all together first – but thankfully God meets us where we are and calls us to follow and serve.

Peter, the fisherman, that man after many of our own hearts, the one who could act on impulse and put his foot in his mouth when silence would have worked better shows us a side, we can all relate to. Peter was a professional fisherman and when Jesus encouraged him to get in the boat and go out into the deep water to catch fish, Peter quickly reminds Jesus that they had tried all night but couldn't catch anything. And then added, *"Yet, if you say so, I will let down the nets."* He let down the nets and when he did, he caught so many that the fisherman in the other boat had to come over and help them to hoist the nets that were about to break. Yes

¹ Isaiah 6.9-13 NRSV

– Jesus knew where the fish were but then that same feeling of shame and humiliation came upon Peter and he fell down at Jesus’ knees and said something that sounded a whole lot like Isaiah: “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” He had been shown up not by just another fisherman but by the very Son of God!

Far from disqualifying Peter to serve Christ it was his primary qualification. He knew that he in himself was not sufficient. As the Rev. Leonard J. Vander Zee put it: *“It all begins when Jesus comes to us in the middle of our lives, where we work, where we live, the seaside, the classroom, the hospital, the office, the kitchen, and asks us to trust him enough to do one strange little thing, like fishing in the deep water in broad daylight. It’s the kind of thing that’s a little weird, a bit outside your usual routine. But that’s often where Jesus’ call comes to us: where we least expect it. Where we’ve failed. Where we feel over our heads. Where we feel uncomfortable. Where we sense our own futility. Jesus does not typically walk into our lives where we feel in control, where we are flush with our own success. It’s in our places of vulnerability and confusion, failure and sin. He likes to get us out there in the deep water in broad daylight where we feel a little silly*

and strange.” Saying it another way, God uses cracked pots – imperfect vessels. God believes in us way more than we believe in ourselves.

God knows what God can do with a person who has been *tested and found to be humble and willing to follow his direction* even when it doesn’t seem to make any sense to them. Right then and there, after the successful catch of fish Jesus prophesies and declares Peter called to serve: *“Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.”* God comes to us not in time of victory and triumph but in our human frailty and vulnerability and asks, “are you willing to trust Me to be strong in you, and to follow my lead?” The great Canadian bard, Leonard Cohen said it best when he wrote:

Ring the bells that still can ring,
Forget your perfect offering,
There is a crack in everything,
That’s how the light gets in.²

² Cohen, Leonard, *Anthem*