

THE FIFTH SUNDAY after Epiphany

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How about you? Have you sensed Jesus calling you? What have you done about it? Is he extending the call again, now, in a deeper way than before? What will you do? There's a very real sense that in any call as Jesus' disciples, there is a circular fishing net like the ones of Peter and Andrew, of James and John, and there is a boat. However, like the first century Galilean fishing boat found buried in the mud 35 years ago, our calling may be stuck by our fears. God calls us to not only mission, but trusting in His love to engage in that mission.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen

In my work as an Interim Rector and as a parish priest I have met so many people who tell me they feel they just don't measure up in God's eyes: that they're not good enough, don't do enough, don't love enough, don't give enough.

You have heard me share this pastoral experience from the pulpit before, quite a few times, actually. Considering the Grace of God given, it is disconcerting to my ears. And to my heart.

And then you would have heard me say this, to you, as well, that, of course, those who feel this way, well, they're right -- about "not enough."

There's always more for each of us "to do."

There's always more room for us to attain holiness,

There's always evidence of indifference to others and that we can love each other much more, And according to the standard of the 10% tithe, there's more for us to give.

But that's not the end of the story of how we stand before God.

And it's not the beginning of that story either.

The fact that I'm not yet doing enough -- and the reality that I'll probably never do all that I possibly could -- doesn't for a moment change who I am in God's eyes, that is, my identity in Christ.

I am by Grace in Salvation, clothed in Christ. And thus in the eyes of God the Father, I am never worthless, no matter how great my failings... in the eyes of God, YOU are never worthless... no matter how great YOUR failings...

In God's eyes each of us is, always, as the Body of Christ and members of it, the Father's beloved...

Most folks have a hard time with this. As I said to you a couple of sermons ago -- and every time this message comes forward by scripture readings provided for us on Sundays, and so you know I'm not just making it up on my own -- I believe most of the hard time we have with this Good News message is fear. We are afraid we are failing God at the very core of our being.

It wasn't part of the lections today, but it is such a powerful image that we have from the

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prophet Isaiah who had a problem with it, too. You remember that after his vision encounter with God, and God's calling of him, but even though Isaiah had not actually seen God's face, but certainly all of His glory, Isaiah's first words were, *"Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips..."*

You hear the fear?

And what was the Lord's response?

He sends an angel to cleanse Isaiah's lips, the very subject of Isaiah's fearful confession, with the sweet kiss of an ember, a lit coal, glowing with mercy.

We heard in the Gospel today that Simon had the same difficulty.

After hauling into his boat, by the Lord's revelation and direction, with the help of all his fishing compadres, the greatest catch he'd ever made,

Peter falls on his knees and says, *"Get away from me, Lord -- I'm a sinful man!"*

You hear the fear?

And the Lord's response? Right to the heart of the heart that Simon does not want to be revealed, Jesus says, simply, *"Peter, don't be afraid of me..."*

In each of these scriptures the Lord is calling someone for a particular task:

Isaiah to be a prophet, today's calling to Gideon to be a mighty warrior for Israel, last week's calling to Jeremiah to face every roadblock to carry God's message, Peter to spread the gospel right when he can't find the fish by himself. But in each of these callings we hear in the stories that the Lord has to break through into their cognizance how Isaiah, Jeremiah, Gideon and Peter see themselves

so that they might begin to see how God sees them.

The fear of actually being seen by God and known by God and trusted by God enters our thinking, our emotions, even our physical strength. If we have this fear of revelation – and we must never overlook the Great Deceiver Himself attempting to confuse God's People – then we must be able to recognize that we need to know more of who GOD is, and not letting that ignorance influence His amazing grace.

I don't know that it would have made any difference in the first part of the interaction between Gideon and God, but at the end of the story we can see what complications we can create for ourselves from our fear factor. Gideon got something wrong, and it caused him apoplexy right at the moment he should have been giving Thanks for God showing him the sign he asked for. He got the confirmation of God's calling to be a mighty man of battle and valor for God's kingdom, but almost – fearfully – ran from it again.

What happened? It suddenly occurred to Gideon that he had in fact been in the presence of God through the angel who was speaking to him. And, like Isaiah's fearful conclusion, Gideon said, "Help me, Lord God! For I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face." What was wrong here? Was it being in the presence of God? No. God had said so many generations earlier said to Moses, that if anyone was to look directly at the Lord's face he would surely die. But he never said the same about looking into the face of an Angel of the Lord. Gideon's fear influenced his conclusion. Sounds like the twisting of things that also happened in the Garden

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of Eden. But the LORD said to Gideon, without calling him ignorant of the Truth of what he'd told Moses, "Peace be to you; do not fear, you shall not die."

We all do the same thing in regard to God's mercy and grace and judgment. And yet, these are the Good News promises of God the Father to us through Jesus Christ. There can be, then, such a disconnect between God's promises and our inability to receive them as he desires for us to do.

You can make the argument that the greatest mistake our Good News faith AND religion can make is to lead