

## THE RIGHT GIFTS FOR THE RIGHT JOB

2/10/19 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA

Epiphany 5 (C): Isaiah 6:1-8; Psalm 138; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11

Do you ever feel like you're in the middle of a British Farce? You know...the comedies where doors are slamming, and unexpected people are going in and out of those slamming doors? Or maybe, in your life, it feels more like an episode of "Who's on first, what's on second, and I don't know's on third."

That's how I felt last Sunday. Apparently, while I was here at church, a leak was discovered down in the shared parking garage of my condo complex, and based on the location of water spraying out of the pipe, the neighbors had determined it was originating from my place.

I won't bore you with the whole story, but it included a plumber who recommended a drain guy; a drain guy who did, in fact, fix my clogged kitchen sink, but said, "I'm only a drain guy," when I asked him to look at the leak downstairs; and a second plumber sent by the drain guy's company. That would be the same plumber, who stood in front of my upstairs neighbor's clogged toilet, holding the plunger in his hand, proclaiming, "I'm a plumber; I can't fix this. It's a drain issue."

Then, of course, there was the second appearance of the drain guy, who, even though he had initially claimed there was nothing he could do about the leak below, fixed the upstairs neighbor's clogged toilet, which was, in fact, causing the leak below! In the end, and only \$200 later between my neighbor and me, all the issues were resolved.

While the metaphorical doors kept slamming shut and flying back open, I kept thinking: "You two work for the same company, why don't they train you to do both plumbing and drains?" But as I began contemplating this week's scripture readings, I thought, "Yeah, that's right...we all have unique gifts, and, usually, unique tools that go with those unique gifts."

Sending the one whose gifts can best serve the situation is obviously key. A drain guy isn't a plumber and a plumber is certainly not a drain guy. Jesus must have seen those subtle differences in the first disciples he called. He could see they each possessed gifts they weren't yet aware of, but gifts his revolutionary plan required. Although none of those he called were perfect, Jesus could see the raw talent in front of him.

In this morning's Gospel reading, Jesus says to Simon Peter, "Don't be afraid." He says this because he is very much aware that he is about to take Peter and the rest of the gang way outside their comfort zone. They are fisherman; they have tools for fishing; fishing is in their blood.

Jesus does three things with his first followers: first, he sees skills in people that are transferrable. These guys currently catch fish, but they are being equipped to fish for people. And second, he meets them right where they are. He doesn't send them off to a 10-week course in discipleship, he joins them in their boat. And then, before suggesting their vocation is about to be upended, he gives them a taste of the abundance available in God's kingdom. Jesus fills the same nets that had been empty for hours with so much fish that the boat is about to sink.

Gifts are being recognized by God in our reading from Isaiah also. In both passages—the one from Luke and the one from Isaiah, the person being tapped to use their gifts in new ways, initially refuses by pushing back. The prophet Isaiah says, “Woe is me...I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.” In other words, I am sinful and not worthy of doing these divine tasks.

Simon Peter makes a similar claim, that he, too, is unworthy of being counted among Jesus’ chosen. When Jesus fills the boat up—which happens, of course, after Peter has just doubted it’s possible to catch any fish at all—Peter cries out, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”

Yet, instead of accepting the refusal of God’s chosen, God anoints them. Isaiah is anointed by the touching of his lips. Peter is anointed with those infamous words: “Do not be afraid.” The truth of it is that none of us are worthy; none of us are ready, none of us possess all the tools we need for the task at hand, but by the grace of God, we are called to do the things God needs us to do anyway.

Which is why it’s important to remember that even the greatest among God’s helpers didn’t start with: “Here I am; send me”; they usually began with a refusal—with a list of reasons why they weren’t the person for the job. And, then, after God’s anointing or assurance, they came around to say, “Okay then. I’ll give it a go. I’ll do my best.”

It’s usually at about this point that some well-meaning person in our life says, “Don’t worry; God never gives you more than you can handle.” Don’t you hate that saying? I do! It assumes that God is out there someplace shuffling us around like chess pieces, deciding what we’re ready for and what we’re not ready for, and then sending us into some awful situation to test us.

I don’t believe that’s how God works. Why would God “test” us? What if human life is just fraught with complexities—mostly because we have free will—and our only test is to make decisions and take actions that are life-giving or not?

I’m not even sure that God doles out these spiritual gifts in any intentional way. Again, if that’s the case, why would one person be purposefully given a gift that brings success, fame and fortune, while another person is intentionally given gifts that are undervalued by our society and will likely bring about suffering in that person’s life? Instead, I think thousands of factors are at play as our DNA swirls around, forming us into God’s image. But no matter our gifts—and we all have them—God calls us to use them.

Society has trained us well to be aware of our faults, our sins, and our misgivings. In our reading from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, we find the Apostle Paul rattling off his own wicked ways. In his case, however, he’s already come to terms with the idea that this is how God works. God takes those who aren’t ready, who are vulnerable, and who have doubts, meets them where they are, and, then, equips them to go out and do God’s work in the world.

So, the Divine plan isn’t about moving us around on the stage of life to enact God’s plan. Rather the Divine plan is to reconcile the world to God. That can happen in many, many ways. Either way, God is well-pleased when we live into our full potential, because as Paul has pointed out in his letters to the Corinthians, no gift is more valuable than the others. We need them all.

As Paul explains, the truth of the resurrection is a mystery beyond our comprehension, but a mystery that lies in knowing that the benefit comes to us through God's grace. This mystery requires us to fully surrender, to give back to God that which God gave us.

So, we're wrapping up this series—both in our sermons and our 9 o'clock sessions—that has focused us on our spiritual gifts. Now we move forward with them, not just fishing for people and inviting them into God's world, but using our gifts to take action on God's behalf—not just believing Christ's words, but following in his footsteps.

Although we can't understand the mystery of God, it is in making ourselves vulnerable and entering into that mystery where we meet God. Remember, inherent in those great British farces, while doors are slammed shut, another door is always opened. In those shutting and opening of doors are the very opportunities for us to use our gifts in new ways...the right gifts for the right job. You may not feel ready, prepared or equipped, but God will anoint you to do God's work. Trust that, because the world needs your gifts.

-AMEN

### ***The Collect***

Set us free, O God, from the bondage of our sins, and give us the liberty of that abundant life which you have made known to us in your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

### **Isaiah 6:1-8, [9-13]**

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

## Psalm 138

- 1 I will give thanks to you, O LORD, with my whole heart; \*  
before the gods I will sing your praise.
- 2 I will bow down toward your holy temple  
and praise your Name, \*  
because of your love and faithfulness;
- 3 For you have glorified your Name \*  
and your word above all things.
- 4 When I called, you answered me; \*  
you increased my strength within me.
- 5 All the kings of the earth will praise you, O LORD, \*  
when they have heard the words of your mouth.
- 6 They will sing of the ways of the LORD, \*  
that great is the glory of the LORD.
- 7 Though the LORD be high, he cares for the lowly; \*  
he perceives the haughty from afar.
- 8 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you keep me safe; \*  
you stretch forth your hand against the fury of my enemies;  
your right hand shall save me.
- 9 The LORD will make good his purpose for me; \*  
O LORD, your love endures for ever;  
do not abandon the works of your hands.

## 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you--unless you have come to believe in vain.

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them--though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

**Luke 5:1-11**

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.