



# *Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany*

## *Sermon by Revd Alison Thabethe*



Sunday 6 February 2022

### READINGS

Isaiah 6: 1-8; Psalm 138; 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11; Luke 5: 1-11

## *Answering God's Call*

The ending of today's gospel reading is well known for Jesus' memorable comparison. Looking at the fishermen Simon, James and John, Jesus said "Follow me and I will teach you how to fish for people." And immediately they left their nets – their work, their livelihood and income – and became his followers: disciples who would be taught by him; who would be his companions and friends.

When we look at this one life-changing decision as Simon Peter answers Jesus' call, there are a number of aspects to identify as we consider what it means for us to say "Yes" to our own calling as followers of Jesus.

Perhaps you can remember a moment that was life changing for you – an encounter with God that was so transformative you can pinpoint the time, the place, the event and your response? In this week's lectionary readings we are directed to the book of the prophet Isaiah, chapter six, the account of Isaiah's own calling as one of the greatest of Israel's prophets. While worshipping in the temple, he is caught up with a vision of the Lord almighty, exalted on his throne, angel hosts proclaiming "Holy, holy, holy," the doorposts of the temple shaking at the sound of their voices.

It's a mystical vision, a moment of revelation that lifts him out of the ordinary, everyday reality and sets him apart for the work he is called to do.

It's interesting to compare this calling to the one we read about in Luke's gospel. Simon and the other fishermen are also caught up with Jesus in an experience that is out of the ordinary. It too is miraculous but I wouldn't call it mystical: I'd say rather that it was very concrete and practical. It involves nets bulging with fish, enough to almost sink two boats, after a night in which they had caught nothing and after they had given up for the day and were cleaning their nets.

What the two encounters have in common is Isaiah and Simon Peter's immediate response. In recognising God's presence, however it came to them, both of these very different men spoke about being sinful or unclean. They were aware of how they fell short, declaring themselves not worthy and not equipped. In both accounts, the Bible doesn't dwell on their faults or sin, but rather on God's response. It is clear that it is God who makes us worthy of the calling and God who equips us to serve, if only we answer yes, and follow.

It also seems that it is God who comes to us and finds us where we are – whether worshipping in the temple, or cleaning our nets on the sand. Whether worshipping via the online service from our home, or in the church service, or sometimes when we are doing the dishes or travelling to work. God speaks to us in a language that we understand – whether it's Isaiah's familiarity with temple worship and scripture, or the fisherman's knowledge of the sea and tricks of the trade.

You may have one or many such examples for yourself of a time when you heard God call to you, or you may be sitting here today longing for something that is as clear and decisive as the calling of the first disciples. We don't need to have a story that is dramatic and impressive – few people do. The main thing is are we listening? Are we ready? What obstacles do we carry within us that stand in our way?

Simon could have been unwilling to let Jesus borrow his boat. Are we generous and open hearted? Simon could have scoffed at Jesus' instruction to lower the nets one more time. Are we arrogant and inflexible? Are we prepared to be inconvenienced, let alone to have our certainty disrupted in the way that Simon and his fishing partners did on that day? Because if we are going to experience God's transformative mercy, to receive God's grace for ourselves and to hear God's call to be agents of that grace in our world, we must be prepared to think differently, and act differently and to disrupt our preconceived ideas and the scripts we prefer to follow.

I conclude with a final observation on the topic of answering God's call. I began by asking if any of us could remember a moment where our life had changed and we knew it was because of a "yes" to God. What if each week, as we gather in worship (in person or online), we gathered to hear God call us again? Can we as a community invite one another to a place where we experience God's mercy, through our praises, through our prayers, through the act of worship and the grace of the sacrament?

Simon and his friends didn't stop at just counting all the fish they had caught that day. It wasn't about one successful and satisfying moment. They knew that this sign was given to them for a greater purpose. So too with us. As we encounter God in worship, not depending on the choice of the hymns or the standard of the sermon or if the prayers were to our liking, each week we are here "to receive God's grace for ourselves and to hear God's call to be agents of that grace in our world." Whenever we end our Eucharist, encouraged by the grace we have received, we respond with the prayer: "Father Almighty, we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice through Jesus Christ our Lord. Send us out into the world, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to live and work to your praise and glory."

There is not one week when Jesus does not call to each of us, "Follow me." Who is there to bring God's love, God's justice, God's mercy into our world? What is that closing prayer if not our response to the words "Follow me," and our answer to God's question, "Whom shall I send?" Each week, we close our service with our version of the words Isaiah replied, saying, "Here I am Lord. Send me."