

The Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time 2019

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Luke 5:1-11

+In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

The Sunday before Father Jonathan's own Nuptial Mass, he stood in this very pulpit, and found himself about to launch into his sermon with the Gospel text being John's account of the wedding feast at Cana.

In a similar vein, today, I, myself an ordinand - every day asked to consider the idea and theology of calling and vocation - am faced with not only Isaiah's classic text of calling: "Here I am! Send me."

But also Luke's account of the first calling of the Apostles by Our Lord on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

An ordinand with texts about calling - the vicar does indeed move in mysterious ways(!)

Perhaps for us today, the two key figures to have in our minds are Isaiah and Simon Peter. These are well-known stories of calling with which we may well be very familiar.

In today's passage from Isaiah, we get what we expect from a text about calling. His own acknowledgement of his fallenness, his recognition of his own sin and his sins forgiven.

All of which lead to Isaiah coming across as something of a quick and enthusiastic volunteer. After all, so many of our Old Testament prophets are more than a little reluctant to offer themselves to the often troubling task to which God calls them.

Not Isaiah.

Once he figures out that his sinful mouth is no longer an obstacle, he seems to get pretty excited.

The Lord says: 'Mmmmm...who shall I send...?'

And Isaiah's down in the front row, jumping up with his hand: "Send me, Send me!"

And then we can turn to our Gospel reading.

There's Simon Peter, James and John cleaning their nets after an unimpressive night's fishing. The text seems to indicate that Jesus is teaching nearby: people were pressing Jesus to speak more.

Jesus then gets into Simon Peter's empty boat.

Simon Peter most likely recognised Jesus as one of the wandering preachers around the shore of the Lake, otherwise we might suppose that Simon Peter may not have taken too kindly to someone clambering into his boat and telling him to launch out again on to the water.

Once Jesus finishes teaching, he tells them to drop the nets. And Simon Peter, replies (without the expletives that I suspect might have been used):

'Master, we toiled all night!' But if you say so, we will let down the nets'.

This word 'Master' or *epistata* shows that Simon Peter is not yet calling Jesus Lord. The word used is emphatically not *kyrios*.

This matters. He's not recognising anything mystical or miraculous or divine about Jesus just yet.

Of course, once they do recognise Jesus as Lord, - they then return to shore, leaving everything (we presume the nets and the boats) and follow him.

So, yes today's texts create lots of images for us to reflect upon when it comes to calling.

From Isaiah's heavenly dream to the lakeside scene that we can all somehow imagine so easily. In Isaiah, perhaps as we expect, God's response to sin is that the prophet's guilt is taken away and his sins forgiven.

We readily understand this dynamic. It's behavioural.

It's about what Isaiah does. He admits to being a man of unclean lips. The right response is his guilt and God's response is forgiveness. But as we learn more about God, perhaps we begin to see that sin isn't always about forgiveness.

Sin isn't just about guilt, it's about brokenness, unholiness, and unrighteousness. It's about turning away from our true selves and pushing the God who loves us away because if God wants anything, God wants us to love our true selves.

When we look at today's Gospel reading, it's plain to see that sin isn't just about forgiveness.

After the nets become so full that they almost burst, Simon Peter declares his sinfulness and can no longer bear to be in Jesus' presence. He falls down in front of Jesus, struck by his own unworthiness, unable to stay in Jesus' presence.

Something has changed. Notice that Jesus is now not *epistata* Master but Jesus is *kyrios*, his Lord.

What we see here is not Simon Peter's guilt, but his shame.

Simon Peter appears bound by his own shame, his own unworthiness to be in Jesus' presence. What's the evidence for this? Well, perhaps if we turn to Jesus' own response.

Does he offer forgiveness? Does he say, 'Simon Peter, you are sinful, but you are now forgiven?'

No.

Because sin isn't always or just about guilt; just as God's response is not always or only about forgiveness.

Jesus responds to this broken man, perhaps bound by shame that he doesn't even understand, by calling him.

He offers no words of forgiveness because Simon Peter's sin is not the sin of guilt requiring forgiveness, but a sense of shame requiring restoration and healing.

He just tells him directly: "there is nothing to fear." In this act, he unbinds him, restores him. He calls him.

God's response to our sin, if we repent, is forgiveness. Of course and heaven knows we need that. But sin is isn't always about those things that need forgiving.

Sin is also about those things that need restoring, where our fears need calming and our souls crave the calling of our Lord.

Of course, I want to tell you that calling is about being your true self. It is. That calling is about listening to what God is saying to you, here and now, and it is. That calling is about recognising your God-given skills and passions and using them in God's service. And it is.

All this is well and good, and right and proper. In this is the heart and joy of Gospel living. But this calling is also for those of us, like Simon

Peter, who may have fallen to our knees and understand what shame might feel like. This calling is for those of us, like Simon Peter, who have been overwhelmed by God's holiness and found ourselves wanting.

This calling is for those of us, like Simon Peter, who continue to doubt, question, get angry, fall down, stand up, fall down, stand up...who, like Simon Peter, think that calling is probably not for people like us.

It seems to me that Isaiah's vision and response of calling bears very little resemblance to how most of us experience God's call in our lives. We simply don't just repent of our sins, receive forgiveness and then get sent, loyally following God's call.

Whereas with Simon Peter we see Jesus – as so often the case – see right into the guts of the person before him. He knows that Simon Peter's sin is not his guilt and things done, but that he is broken and shame-bound.

We don't know why he's broken, but Jesus does. And his response is still to call him.

Jesus refuses to leave us to ourselves. He doesn't stay at a distance, waiting for us to be ready for him. He calls us anyway.

More than that, Jesus gives us his Mother at the foot of the cross, and she recognises her Son in each of us and will dig deep for his presence in you.

That presence which calls Simon Peter, and which calls you and me, up off our knees to hear the words again and again: there is nothing to fear, do not be afraid...come follow me.

+In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.