

**SERMON**  
**+ 5 Epiphany C**  
**February 9, 2025**

Simon Peter knows Jesus.  
He has seen him cast out demons,  
cure diseased people,  
heal his mother-in-law of a fever,  
and heard him teach.

He knows there's something different about him.  
That he has unusual power.  
That's why, when Jesus commanded him  
to put out into the deep water  
and let down the nets for a catch of fish,  
Simon calls him "Master," like teacher or rabbi.

But of course, he goes on to suggest to Jesus  
that this is an impractical command.  
At best, it's a waste of time.  
After all, Simon is the professional fisherman here;  
this is his business,  
and he and his partners  
have just come in from a full night of fishing  
and have caught nothing.

But then he says,  
"Yet, if you say so..."  
and he obeys the Master.

And you know what happened.  
This failed fisherman witnesses Jesus' power  
over the forces of nature,  
because there was nothing natural about that catch of fish.  
And everybody knows, only God has power over nature.

Simon knew it.  
And that's when he came to see  
that he was dealing, not just with a Master – teacher or rabbi –  
but with a holiness and divine power beyond this world.

So he changed it and called him “Lord.”

And that led to his next revelation.  
In the presence of one with such holy and divine power,  
he – Simon Peter – was a sinful man.  
Humble and fallen and unrighteous before Jesus,  
he fell down before him  
and said, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man,”  
because tradition held that anyone who saw God would die.

Isaiah had the same experience  
five hundred years before Simon Peter.  
He had this vision that he saw the Lord enthroned in the temple –  
a vision too great for human eyes.

And yet he saw it –  
God’s robe so massive  
that the hem of it filled the temple.  
And the seraphs flew around him  
and sang, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts”  
in praise of the Lord enthroned above him,  
and the thresholds shook,  
and the house filled with smoke.  
And Isaiah knew he was in the presence  
of holy and divine power.  
So, all he could say was, “Woe is me! I am lost,  
for I am a man of unclean lips...”

It’s why, when we gather here in worship,  
in the presence of the Lord of life –  
who promises to be with us  
in the word and sacraments,  
in the community of his body,  
and in acts of mercy and love for those in need –  
we begin here by laying our human failure and sinfulness  
right out there in the open  
in a prayer of confession before God and one another.

It’s not an easy truth to admit about ourselves,  
though we are quick to recognize so much evidence of it

in others around us.

And yet, gathered in the presence of holy and divine power  
and the promised presence of Christ,  
it is who we are – sinful human creatures –  
and it is right to acknowledge that,  
and to lay it before God in honesty and truth.

Because we know what happens next  
for Isaiah and Simon Peter.  
They are not struck down.  
They are not cast out.  
They do not die.

In a ritual act of purging and purifying,  
a seraph brought a burning coal from the fire on the altar  
and touched Isaiah's unclean lips with it,  
and declared, "your guilt is departed  
and your sin is blotted out."

And Jesus said to Simon Peter,  
"Do not be afraid."

And we hear similar words:  
"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you.  
I have called you by name. You are mine.  
In Christ, you are forgiven."

And that means that Simon Peter and Isaiah  
and you and me  
are not bound by the unclean lips or the sinfulness,  
the brokenness, failure, or frailty of our humanity,  
but we are set free in the holy and divine power of God  
for forgiveness, and newness, and life.

So, the story goes on for Isaiah  
and for Simon Peter,  
and for you and me.

In the usual way that God equips the called

rather than calling the equipped,  
Jesus declared to Simon Peter –  
the professional fisherman  
who had failed in a full night's work to catch one fish –  
“from now on, you will be catching people.”

And to Isaiah, who confessed,  
“I am a man of unclean lips,”  
God sends him to proclaim the word of God –  
to declare the judgement of God to an entire nation.

And to you – God comes to you in the waters of Holy Baptism  
and makes you a beloved child,  
and gives to you an inheritance of eternal life  
through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus,  
and fills you with the Holy Spirit of life  
to call you and equip you  
to proclaim that same word of God,  
to serve those whom Christ loves with his mercy and forgiveness,  
and to be the power and presence of God for others.

God comes to you in the written and proclaimed word  
and in the community gathered around it  
to teach us and to inspire us  
to support one another in unity,  
to care for one another in love.

God comes to you  
in the body and blood of Christ  
to nourish you in the faith,  
to unite us to one another,  
and to fill you with his presence for you.

Simon and his partners, James and John,  
brought both boats – filled to the brim with fish – back to the shore.  
It was surely the best catch of their career.  
But when they got there,  
they left everything, and followed Jesus.

And Isaiah went on to proclaim the word of God

to the whole nation –  
the word we can read for ourselves over 2500 years later  
in the book of the prophecy of Isaiah.

And so for you.  
Called and equipped by the word of God  
and the power of the Holy Spirit in you,  
you too live out your calling to be a disciple of Jesus  
and a beloved child of God.

Sending a card to someone who is sick,  
calling a neighbor just to check in.

Raising money for a cause,  
giving money for a cause,  
organizing an event for a cause,  
lifting up the work of a cause.

Gathering with your community to worship,  
gathering with your friends to learn,  
gathering with a neighbor to grieve,  
gathering with one another for fellowship.

Praying for those you love,  
praying for those on a list you don't even know,  
seeking the prayers of the community for others.

Sharing your story of coming to faith with your children,  
sharing your story of faith with your neighbor.

There are so many ways you live out the life of a disciple of Jesus  
and a beloved child of God  
as a baptized, forgiven, called, and equipped member of the body of Christ  
and as a neighbor who loves.  
Thanks be to God for calling and equipping us for this ministry.