

“Let Down Your Safety Nets”

Epiphany is the church's religious season for catching glimpses of the Divine in creation. It's our spiritual time for asking God (whom we only know in part) to open the eyes of our heart for our transformation by Holy Mystery. It's our soul's time for thickening with the unconditional Love of our Maker. It's our personal time to be awed and inspired to continue in our evolution as a beloved child of God. It's faith's time for telling about how encounters with Almighty God call us to change our way of seeing the world, to Love as God loves, and to new obedience.

Mystical glimpses of the Divine change our way of seeing the world. According to the Hebrew stories of faith, Isaiah's perception of Reality was changed during the God forsaken time when king Uzziah reigned. It happen when Isaiah was in the Jerusalem temple trying to recover his sense of perspective and he saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; with the hem of his robe filling the temple. In addition to the vision he heard the attending angels proclaim something utterly unbelievable about God. “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of God's glory.” Immediately Isaiah understood that God had not abandoned Israel even though Israel had forsaken God. He realized that the power of the Lord was present to them through human confession and Divine forgiveness. It dawned on him while the temple was rocking with the Spirit of Compassion, that the Lord who promised to seek Holy Communion with sinful human hearts in every generation---was after his heart too. Humbled and awed by God's unconditional love, Isaiah responded with new eyes, saying: “Here am I. Send me.”

Mystical encounters with the Divine enable us to Love as God loves. Centuries ago while at the edge of death, Christian Mystic Julian of Norwich encountered God. In “Showings” she wrote:

“God showed me something small, no bigger than a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, as it seemed to me, and it was as round as a ball . . . I thought because of its littleness it would have suddenly fallen into nothing. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and always will, because God loves it; and thus everything has being through the will of love of God” (Christian Century, 1-26-10, p. 21).

In his reflection on today's scriptures Walter Brueggemann suggested that one way the Lord begins to open the eyes of our heart is by meeting us where we are--- at our point of personal need and at our limitation of human power. He noted:

The drama begins in the reality of human need and the inability of humans to resolve that need themselves. Isaiah 6:5 and Luke 5:8 offer an admission of powerlessness in the face of sin. In the psalm the trouble is an enemy from which deliverance is required (Psalm 138:7). In the lyric of Paul (1 Corinthians 15), the human condition concerns the power of death. Thus the predicament of sin, enemies, and death attests to the helplessness of the actors in the text. The response of God to such need overwhelms and cancels out the trouble. The God of the gospel is an answering God. Isaiah is answered by “blotting out sin” (Isaiah 6:7). In the gospel story it is, “Do not be afraid (Luke 5:10). The psalmist can say, “On the day I called, you answered me” (Psalm 138:3). In 1 Corinthians 15, it is a “victory” (v. 57). The claim of faith is that our vexed life has been answered and resolved by the attentive mercy of God” (Sojourners, February, 2010).

What this means for us is that when we experience the ordinary questions of life like: Why do I feel stuck? Do I have a purpose? Why do I feel empty? Why can't I let go? Can I really change? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why am I afraid of commitment? . . . God is paying attention, Love will show us mercy, and the Holy Spirit will come to us with faith's answer.

Mystical encounters with the Divine call forth a faithful response of new obedience from us. The form that obedience takes varies.

Brueggemann gleaned four different responses in the cluster of lectionary readings for today (ibid): He noted that:

Isaiah is "sent" (Isaiah 6:8-9).

The disciples "follow" (Luke 5:11).

The psalmist erupts in thanks.

The Easter church stands "steadfast and immovable" (1 Cor. 15:58).

Last Monday at our monthly REACH meeting I found myself talking about a response of "following" to the group. I said: "What I've noticed since I moved here is that most West Bridgewater families help each other out in times of need. This is really good news. The other good news is that there are also lots of organizations and people in town who help those in need who are not kin. That's our job. Our work is to find those who are in need and to do what we can so that they will not fall between the cracks." As I spoke, Jesus' command to the unsuccessful fishermen percolated through my thoughts. When Jesus had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch" (Luke 5:4). John Pilch wrote:

Some scholars say, that the relationship Simon Peter entered into with Jesus was a "client-patron" one, where "family-like" bonds provided help when the family couldn't. "A patron is someone who can get for you something you could not obtain by your own abilities, or on better terms than you could arrange for yourself" (John Pilch, The Cultural World of Jesus, Cycle C).

As followers of Jesus, the church is called to let down our safety nets in unchartered waters, to find those in need, and to do our best to help those who cannot help themselves. Jesus said to his disciples, "Do not be afraid." Christ calls to us in the same way today, saying: **Put down your safety nets into the deep waters of environmental concerns; equality in health care; immigration; outsourced jobs; domestic violence; equality in marriage; ending war. . . Put down your safety nets for those who are powerless and in need and have faith, that the Holy Spirit's catch for the Lord will be great.**

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."

Luke 5:1-11

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.