

5 Epiphany  
February 7, 2010  
Fr Bill McGinty

### **“Called to AGAPE”**

In the readings today, Jesus has come back into Galilee to the shores of the Lake of Gennesaret. Every where he goes in Galilee, he is surrounded by large crowds. They are eager, we are told, to hear the words of scripture and the prophets from this new young teacher. In the Gospel, Jesus employs a trick he uses several times in the Gospel of preaching from a boat with the crowd sitting on the shore.

Luke in the Gospel, also uses a writing technique that he repeats many times in his Gospel. He describes Jesus teaching; then he has Jesus perform a miracle and he concludes with Jesus using the miracle to teach a lesson. Always: Luke leaves his listener with a key sentence for them to remember, in this case: “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.”

Fear, psychologists tell us, is a factor that stops many of us from doing the things we really want and would like to do. Just as “Fear of Flying” will stop us traveling long distances, many other fears hold us back from living the full life we deserve to live.

Jesus in the Gospels preface what he is going to say with the words: “Do not be afraid.” The disciples had much to fear. They were simple men, uneducated and not knowledgeable about anything outside their town and work. This was a radical and dangerous young teacher whose ideas would certainly unset Herod the ruler of Galilee, the Jewish leader and ultimately the Roman authorities.

There was much to fear, for ordinary people in Palestine. In, or around 2 BC the Jews of Jerusalem had rebelled against Roman rule. The Emperor Augustus sent in four Roman legions. They crushed the rebellion and crucified or killed 2,000 Jews. It was meant as a lesson. The Jews did not forget.

Less than thirty years have passed and already Jesus is beginning to attract attention. Already his cousin John, has been arrested and thrown into Herod’s notorious dungeon.

Jesus asks Simon, Andrew, James and John to follow him and become his disciples. To do so, they must leave home and family, their fishing boats and all that they know. It was a lot to ask of any, least of all young men with wives and children.

The great attraction in becoming a disciple was the opportunity to be taught scripture and the teachings of the prophets from a young Rabbi, who could read and was knowledgeable in what now we call the Old Testament. Up until then, the only time people heard “The word of God” was in the synagogue on the Sabbath.

We could imagine Jesus teaching this passage, from our first reading, to these same disciples around the evening campfire.

In the passage Isaiah writes in the 1<sup>st</sup> person. The story he tells is the story of how God invites him into his service. It is a calling. It is similar to two other stories in the Old Testament: “The story of the call of the boy Samuel while he sleeps in Eli’s house,” and secondly “The call of the prophet Jeremiah”, which we heard last

week. Like Jeremiah, Isaiah pleads that he is not worthy and that he is a man of unclean lips. Like Samuel, Isaiah's ultimate reply to God's call to service is: "Here I am. Send me."

Jesus teaches his disciples that God calls all people who worship him with their lips, to also worship him with their hearts through service to building his Kingdom of love and forgiveness. To do that, you must believe, not with your eyes or your mind, but with your very being.

St Paul picks up on this need for faith in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians. Paul is writing to Christians who were not eye witnesses, had never met Jesus, and had heard everything second or third hand. Paul re-assures them by telling them that "yes, he saw Jesus after his death and resurrection." He impresses on them faith is not in vain. He presents his credentials as an apostle. "The grace that he received" he tells the Corinthians, "is now working in them."

Isaiah, Simon and Paul are all called to be somehow used in God's plan of salvation. Isaiah was a priest in the Jerusalem temple, Simon was a big, clumsy fisherman and Paul a lawyer and scholar. We may feel that we are somehow out of place in such company; despite the fact that we all know that we have also been called through Baptism.

When I think of that idea, that we have all been called, I also believe that none of us are here in this place, by accident. God has placed us here, each and everyone of us, for a purpose.

The early Christians believed that too. In coming together they celebrated by reading the 'Word of God'; sharing the Eucharist, and in laying on hands of healing before sending each other out to complete Christ's mission. The Christians called their gathering "an AGAPE" from the Greek word meaning a celebration of love.

In sending members out to preach, heal and teach, the Body of Christians believed that they were not sending them out lone, to face danger and the terror of persecution. They believed that as one body, they spiritually went with them.

In this way the Body of Christ, the church was united in heart, mind and spirit. We can see clearly that the praying church feels somehow responsible for those engaged in the active ministry of the Gospel.

Lent in just one week's time, gives all of us, the opportunity to tap into that great reservoir of grace and knowledge that is the church and God's word. The Book of Common prayer asks us to study in Lent. To take a deeper look at the scriptures, to study our faith more. Each week, we are asked to select a passage and study it in detail and to slowly work our way through the Catechism at the back of the BCP to re-equate ourselves with what we truly believe.

Lent is also a time for reflection, centuries ago Christians took themselves off to a quiet place to devote themselves to prayer. In Lent we ask ourselves the questions that are asked in today's readings:

1. Why is God calling me?
2. How are I responding to God's call in my life?
3. How can I build up the Body of Christ and support Christ's mission?
4. How well do I know this faith of mine?

5. Has my relationship with God changed and developed over the years?
6. Does fear prevent me from taking the next step in following Christ?

Let us pray:

“Father, your Kingdom has come among us, touching our lives and inviting our participation. As we come closer to the end of this season of Epiphany, renew in us our experience of your our God. Bring us again to theophany, whereby we meet you and listen to you, in the quiet reflective moments of our lives. Send us out to build your Kingdom. Fill us with your life giving spirit. Heal us, for your mission. Enrich our faith with knowledge of your word.”

Amen+