

2.6.2022, Epiphany 5

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

“Life’s Deep Waters”

*Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

In all of the gospels the body of water known as the Sea of Galilee, or the Sea of Tiberias, figures prominently in Jesus’ travels, teaching and as a pathway on his mission into the world. In today’s gospel this body of water is also called the lake of Gennesaret.

This body of water is a large lake, and like many bodies of water, it is also a boundary and a border. Its surface area is 64 square miles or 166 square kilometers, and its maximum depth is 157 feet or 48 meters. In more recent times, from 1948-1967 this lake formed a border with Syria to the immediate northeast. This lake is large enough that in order to reach the other side travel by boat has been common since antiquity. To this day, through all seasons of the year, it is a lake that supports a fishing economy. It is a lake that has storms and in today’s gospel, it is also the site of Jesus’ calling of his first disciples and the Great Catch of Fish.

Today’s gospel begins as Jesus was standing by the shore of the lake with the crowd pressing in upon him so that he asked to borrow one of the fishermen’s boats and be pushed out onto the lake so that he could speak to the crowd. Perhaps Jesus had noticed that though the fishermen were washing their nets, they had also caught no fish.

So when Jesus had finished speaking, he must have surprised the fishermen because he suddenly said to them, “*Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.*” Jesus must have confounded Simon Peter because with a note of exasperation, he said, “*Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.*”

This story is so well-known that it has been the subject of paintings and even tapestries depicting the Great Catch of Fish and Simon Peter’s confession about his own sinfulness. What is interesting about today’s gospel is that it is both a story about Jesus calling his first disciples, as well as a parable about catching fish in the deep water.

The deep water of the lake is both the place of a miraculous catch of fish and also the place of Simon Peter’s transformation as a disciple of Jesus. When Simon Peter saw the amount of fish, he fell to his knees, saying, “*Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!*”

What could have made Simon Peter say this? He was an experienced fisherman who knew the lake and how to fish. He knew that some days, there would be no catch and it was better to stop

and return to shore. He had fished all night, caught nothing, and yet here was a man catching enough fish in broad daylight to almost sink two boats.

Seeing their catch of fish in the deep water, Simon Peter seemed genuinely afraid of Jesus. Jesus said to him, “*Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people*” – not fishing, but catching people. For this phrase, “catching people,” to begin to make any sense, it is important to notice that the place where this catching or fishing will occur is in the deep waters of human life.

After all, Jesus encountered Simon Peter in the deep waters of his life. Simon Peter was both blessed and grasped by Jesus in that sacred boundary or limit of deep water. Peter’s whole livelihood was made in the deep water of Lake Gennesaret, and at the same time this lake of deep water was the place of his anxiety and worries about his life and livelihood. The lake and its deep water was a reality for Simon Peter, and the image of “deep water” is also a reality for us. We, too, live and work in the deep waters of life.

All of us are in the “deep end of the pool” so to speak. We are all living life up to our necks and at times, perhaps, feeling out of our depth in the deep waters of life. We may not actually be on a fishing boat, but the transforming power of Jesus’ presence nevertheless occurs in the deep waters of our lives. Jesus comes to us in the complexities, difficulties and contradictions of our lives, blessing us, so that we can be sent in mission into the deep waters to help others.

All of the people today’s readings encounter God in the complexity and deepness of life. Isaiah encounters God in the sacred deepness of the Temple, realizing that he is in the presence of God. His own sense of sinfulness is so profound that he says, “*Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.*” For Isaiah, the Temple is a place of being encountered by the deep and forgiving love of God. There is something here for us to think about as we are encountered by God in the beautiful sacred space that is St. Mark’s.

Paul also wrote of being out of his depth, revealing a sense of unworthiness, though he was the earliest of missionaries. Knowing his brokenness and need of grace, he wrote, “*Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me, For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*” Paul understood his call as an apostle as evidence, not of his own greatness, but of God’s grace and forgiveness dwelling within him.

We should not be surprised that Simon Peter, too, was unmasked as a sinful man in the deep waters of his own life. God comes to us in the deep water of human life to save and transform us. Isaiah, Paul and Simon Peter were all encountered in the deep waters of anxiety, sin and human

brokenness by the grace and forgiveness of God. Each of them were transformed and sent out in God's mission into the deep waters of the world.

To be sent in mission, to become a "fisher of people" is to first experience God in the deep waters of one's own fears, brokenness and anxiety. Isaiah knew it, Paul knew it, and so did Simon Peter. God comes to us first when we feel lost, unclean or drowning in life.

Very few of us travel any significant distance or cross the boundaries of deep water by boat anymore. As a missionary, I was aware of this every time I flew over that expansive and deep body of water that is the Pacific Ocean. A generation earlier had still traveled by ship, taking two weeks instead of twelve hours. Nevertheless, God continues to send the church and each of us into life's deep waters in God's mission of love for this world.

After Isaiah, was encountered by God's grace and forgiveness, he heard God's voice saying, "*Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*" He replied, "*Here am I; send me!*" God's mission of sending begins in the deep waters of being encountered and grasped by grace and forgiveness. The Christian journey begins in the deep waters of baptism in which we are forgiven and made heirs of Christ's body the church. Transformed by grace, we are sent into the world no longer afraid of the water. Baptism teaches us to swim in life's deep waters, expecting God's saving presence.

This Sunday and next Sunday we are invited by St. Mark's young people to bring gifts of food for the hungry in our community. St. Mark's mission is always upon life's deep waters. Each week this congregation is a sign of hope in life's deep waters as we feed the hungry and homeless and as we collect and deliver food for those in need. Kairos Prison Ministry visits and helps those in prison in the deep waters of their lives to know that Christ is with them. St. Mark's has been and will continue, through Room In The Inn, to be a shelter for people in need in our community.

This church and its members seeks to help others in the deep waters of their lives because, in Holy Baptism, we have been encountered and saved from life's deepest waters. We know that in Jesus life's deep water has been transformed into a place of salvation and hope.

Our world continues to be a place of deep water, anxiety and suffering, a place in need of people who can travel upon the water to reach others. God continues to ask, "*Whom shall I send?*"

When Simon Peter, James and John brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed Jesus. Forgiven, Paul traveled the seas so that others would know they are forgiven. May we, like Isaiah also respond, "*Here am I, send me.*"

Each day, may we pray, "O Lord, send me out to into life's deep waters to help others." Amen.