

Let us pray: God, make these words Your word, and our hearts your heart. Amen.

Eighteen years ago tomorrow I was ordained to the priesthood. And guess what? The lessons I picked for that day were the very ones appointed for today:

the call to Isaiah in the temple, and the call to Peter on the beach.

One profound and mystical and other-worldly, the other very much of the world, with two boatloads of big, smelly fish flopping around.

Not a bad description of church, this life of following into which Jesus invites us.

(I'm not comparing you to big, smelly, flopping fish, by the way...)

These readings speak of God's calls to us, and the different ways we answer.

Isaiah said, "Here I am, send me!" Peter said, "Go away, Lord!"

What do you say? Or has God not called you to be a prophet? An apostle?

How do you know? "Oh," you might say,

"I don't see any angels flying around in here. Guess I'm off the hook."

Yeah, that's what Peter's fish thought. And Peter.

Guess again, friends! Jesus wants to reel you in too.

It's quite a vision Isaiah had, of the Lord enthroned in the temple,

the angels crying "holy, holy, holy," the foundations shaking.

And the effect of all that holiness, that unmistakable "otherness" of the glory

he beholds is to make him aware of how not holy he is.

But God has an answer for him – a seraph flies to him with a white-hot coal, and

sears his mouth with it. Yet instead of pain, Isaiah experiences cleansing.

The angel declares that Isaiah's sins are blotted out, his guilt has departed.

Then he hears God say, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

And he is able to say, by faith, "Here I am, send me."

First, we come face to face with the reality of God, and the reality of who we are.

Then comes the call, and our answer. In Isaiah's case, the answer was "yes."

In Peter's case it was, at first, "Go away!"

Peter was responding to the same thing Isaiah was –

a face-to-face encounter with the awesome holiness, other-ness of God.

And, like Isaiah, it made him hyper-aware of his own un-holiness.

"Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" he cries.

But notice he doesn't run away. He falls to his knees at Jesus' feet.

He worships him. Even as his mouth is saying “Go away,”
his body language is saying, “Don’t leave me. Please.
I see that you are the real thing, what I need, what I’ve been looking for.”

My friends, that’s what “catches” us, what enables us to help “catch” others.
The reality of Jesus, who died 2,000 years ago and yet is real and alive to us.
That real, alive Jesus invites us into relationship.

Our whole life is relationship – with Jesus, with each other, with the world.
Everything else we “do” flows from that.

We are not called to a religion, a task, or a ministry – we are called to know Jesus,
grow a real, living, growing relationship with the Risen Son of God.

And then we are called to make him known to others.

We’re not here to learn how to be “good people.” There’s no such thing.

We’re here to learn how to be real people. Loved people. Loved people who love.

Do we want to be engaged in this great enterprise of love?

Do we want to be useful to God, participate in what God is up to in this world?

Do we want to live with greater purpose? We are invited to go deeper.

Notice what happens before the fish come: Jesus tells Peter, this seasoned
fisherman, to “Put out into the deep waters and let down your nets.”

The deep water is where we’re going to find our catch.

Our invitation is not to learn better techniques for attracting fish or growing
churches; our invitation is to come into deeper relationship with the One
who already knows where the catch is, the One who made us and the fish,
the One who leads us as we learn to hear his voice, follow his lead.

All the projects and programs I throw at you have that intention –
to help us go deeper into relationship with the living Lord Jesus,
who still shows up where we work and live and says,
“Follow me. I have plans for you.”

How might we go deeper with Jesus and with each other, and then with the world?

I don’t think we can do it in an hour or two on Sundays.

That’s just relationship maintenance.

As with any other relationship or task, we need to offer some time.

And we need to offer our hearts, be willing to open up to God and to each other.

This week, those of you who receive email got an invitation from me
to try on a small group for Lent.

Meeting weekly with other Christ-followers and seekers
is one of the best ways to Go Deeper into God-Life.

These will be simple – a little time with scripture, more time where each person
just says a few things about what’s going on with them this week, their
burdens and challenges and joys, and then some simple prayer together.

It is astonishing how quickly bonds of affection grow
when we know what’s going on in each other’s lives.

It is amazing how much more real God becomes
when we encounter God with other people.

It is incredible how much better we hear God’s invitations to us
when we’re listening with others.

These groups will help us deepen our relationship with Jesus, and with each other.
But I also talked about the world –

God is very interested in our making his love known in the world.

“Follow me, and I will make you a fisher of people.”

When we are more deeply connected to one another, it shows.

People walking into our churches will feel something they’ll want more of.

And as we undertake more ministry outside our churches –

feeding ministries, connecting with people at the motels and in the woods,
starting a community garden, working toward racial justice –
the people we meet will feel this love, and want more of it.

We have learned these two years that you don’t have to join together
at a physical address to be part of the Christ Churches.

God is equipping us to take our act on the road, to be Christ Church

Monday through Saturday in all the places we find ourselves,

to be Jesus people Monday through Saturday in all the places we are.

As we take Jesus with us, people will meet him.

I was called into this life of faith lived out in the church to center my life on
knowing Christ and making Him known, so that others might come to believe.

My primary ministry is to equip you to do the same, with the great gifts
you have been given, in the particular circumstances of your life.

The journey I began 18 years ago tomorrow brought me to you –
and together, God will take us places we cannot yet imagine.

Amen

Luke 5:1-11

Once 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.

Isaiah 6:1-8

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." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"