

Isaiah 6:1-8
Luke 5:1-11
February 14, 2010

Catching People

It has been a frustrating two weeks. Almost everyone I know has been annoyed, inconvenienced, discombobulated and at times testy. Church and school have been canceled; schedules and patterns torn to pieces. Mother Nature has unleashed her fury upon us and we feel exhausted and put out. Records have been exceeded and set. After four or five feet of snow in two weeks, our aches have aches from shoveling. The blizzards of 2010 have taken a toll. Sunshine is so deeply appreciated. The world melt seems a gift from God and many people are all tuckered out with Old Man Winter.

When we walk down to the shore with Jesus in the Gospel of Luke and we sit with Simon, who later becomes Peter, in his fishing boat; we get to hear a sermon from Jesus and we are attentive because it is morning and we have slept well. The voice of Jesus echoes clearly to us over the calm of the morning water and we are energized. Not Simon. Not Simon Peter and his fellow fishermen. They are tired. They are worn out and low voltage. They have just

worked all night out on the boats. Not only are they tired, but they are annoyed and inconvenienced. They are testy because they have worked all night and they have caught nothing. They don't even have a sardine. Something about Jesus inspires them however and they put their boat out in the water; so Jesus can have a pulpit from which to teach.

Sometimes we are so domesticated in our approach to faith, that we think God will answer our prayer and God will call us to our ministry or that we will find our purpose in life while we are reading our Bible, our small group guidebook or while we are worshipping in church. Kind of automatic and instantaneous like when we are hungry we open the fridge and select a treat or we head out to dinner with the gang. I am sure that all those things help; Bible, worship, Logos, Sunday School; that's one of the reasons we engage in church; but It seems when we read scripture that God is just as likely to show up when we are at our wits end. Worse than that God is most likely to show up and ask us to do something when we are all tired out and at the end of our day. Simon and his fishing buddies have come face to face with their limits. The night stunk, they haven't given up, they have cleaned the nets and not only does Jesus ask

them if he can use their boat for a pulpit; but after the sermon he asks them to go out fishing again.

Jesus asks the fishers to try again. Jesus asks the crew to head out into the deep water and drop their nets. Let's imagine for a minute here what the captain is feeling as he receives this request from Jesus. Simon Peter is muttering to himself "This guy doesn't know a darn thing about fishing does he? He ought to stick to carpentry. I mean I know he makes an awesome chair and the perfect yoke for our beasts of burden; but I have been fishing these waters since I was a boy with my father and I will tell you one thing. You don't bleeping catch fish in these parts when you are bleeping fishing in the day time." Something about Jesus tames Simon's tongue. He doesn't call Jesus nuts; but he does mention the fact that they have been fishing all night but have caught nothing. "Yet Master if you say so, I will let down the nets." Ever since Peter said yes to Jesus, the boat on the water has been a symbol for the church. This Picture on the screen is in fact the Logo for the World Council of Churches. Maybe we come to church and pray and read books about faith, so that when God does shows up we will notice it. Of course there is another way of looking at this. Maybe God is always

present and we read books, participate in worship and pray so that we will finally notice God trying to get into our lives.

So with a heavy sigh and with an attitude of OK, I'll humor the guy; Simon and his fishing buddies drop the freshly cleaned nets back into the deep water. Now Simon has a situation on his hands. Not only do his counterintuitive broad day light dunked nets have fish; they are overflowing with fish. In fact there are so many fish that Simon and his crew can't pull the haul in. They are besides themselves with delight. There is a pretty penny in those nets and they will eat well today. Overwhelmed and overjoyed they signal to their fishing partners who are still on shore. We have so many fish. We have caught so much, we need your help... James and John the sons of Zebedee bring their boat to the deep water and there are so many fish that both boats are setting very very low in the water. There is bounty beyond belief and suddenly it hits this Captain Simon who will become Bishop Peter; that this is not normal. This catch is incredible. In fact this catch is supernatural. It's Jesus he realizes, he has served up a super-abundance. It's Jesus he realizes. I am in the presence of the Holy.

Maybe it's because Simon was tired. Maybe it was because he had been fishing those waters his whole life and he had never had a catch like that. Maybe it was because he was ready to mouth off and tell Jesus he was just plain nuts. In any case Simon is overwhelmed by emotion. He is awed by the Holy. He is embarrassed at his own blindness. He is humiliated by his own lack of faith. He is mortified with his mortality and he starts to tear up and he falls down at Jesus' knees and he begs Jesus to go away for I am a sinful man. A few moments ago he was calling Jesus master or teacher (and idiot under his breath); now on his knees in reverence he calls him Lord. Go away from me Lord for I am a sinful man. It always strikes me odd that people apologize to me for crying in church. As if I'll send an e-mail to everyone saying hey George apologized to me for crying in church, everything is cool now. As if it says in some imaginary Presbyterian guide to worship: "tears forbidden". If something moves you to tears in church, an apology shouldn't be on your lips; but what do you suppose is going on?

We see this phenomena in the call of the Prophet Isaiah as well. Isaiah has this big time awesome dream that he is in the presence of God and God is asking him to do something and he

squeaks like a mouse underneath the claws of a cat's paw; woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips. This type of things happens often in scripture. People complain when they have been called by God. People object. They offer excuses. They show you how full their calendar is and the corresponding emptiness in their hearts. They complain, they shuffle and shuck the awe shucks. They say oh all right and then they are bowled over by the bright. There is something about the intensity of God that makes us feel like we have been lurking in the shadows. There is something about the gentle warmth of God that unglugs the faith gobstoppers.

As much ado as some people make about sin and dirt and impurities of every kind, they have their fingers out and their noses high in the air; this is not what God shows us in scripture. God has angel tong touch unclean lips with fiery cleansing coal. God commissions Isaiah, go and speak to the people.

Jesus shrugs and says to Peter "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." Jesus commissions Simon Peter; catch people. Some people think that hate is the opposite of love. It's not true. Fear is the opposite and enemy of love and therefore

the phrase, “do not be afraid” is frequently spoken in scripture. It’s like hand lotion for dry winter skin. Jesus often encourages his disciples to set aside their fears. Apparently God is far more interested in encouraging us than God is bent on indicting us. Fire and brimstone is often hot air. Jesus heals fear and empowers tired hearts. That’s how we catch people. We encourage them, We allay their fears. We listen to them with open hearts and minds. We model a giant catch. We show them our reliance upon God. We give them a hand up so that their lives are transformed and God’s dream is carried into the world. That is what we ask of our elders and our deacons. That is what we ask of our team leaders and small group leaders. That is what we ask of each other as members of this community. Rick Warren says that You don’t judge the strength of an army by how many soldiers sit and eat in the mess hall but by how they perform on the front line. Likewise, a church’s strength is not seen in how many show up but in how many serve in the ministry.

Today we do what most churches do not do. We ordain lay people. We Presbyterians are uniquely equipped to serve the post modern world. We are not so into hierarchy. Oh things need to be done decently and in good order as we say, but we realize that all of

us have been ordained in our baptisms. All of us have been ordained to show other people the Holy that is all around us. All of us have been ordained by God to preach be not afraid and to catch people.. We ordain elders and deacons to lead us. Ordained lay people is of course oxymoronic, unless you understand ordination not so much as a privilege conferred upon the worthy but rather an obligation and a calling taken on by the willing or, at least the softly grumbling almost willing.

We lay hands upon the newly ordained as a symbol of Jesus' Spirit that is promised to us all if we answer God's call. Could it be that Jesus bent over Simon and layed hands on him as he trembled on his knees, and said be not afraid. That is how I choose to imagine this scene today. Jesus laying hands on an overwhelmed Peter saying "be not afraid."

Beware when you are tired and inconvenienced; God will likely show up with a call and a task.