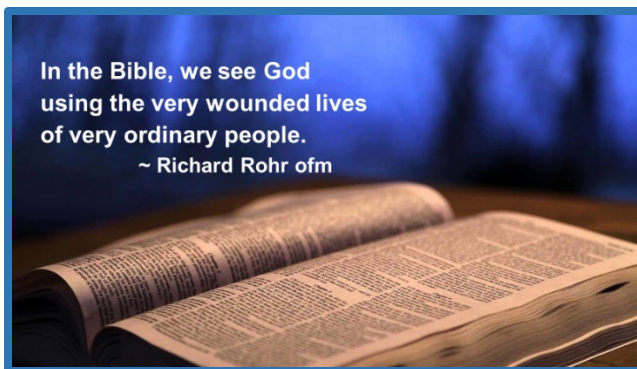


REFLECTIONS FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 06 February 2022

The Mount ~ The Residence at Litledale

Our God is a calling God. Our God calls each one of us to be a missionary disciple, spreading the good news wherever we are present – no matter what our age or our health status or our role in society or our education or our energy levels. This is both terrifying and encouraging – terrifying because God expects each one of us to spread the good news and encouraging because God trusts each one of us to spread the good news despite our own fears about our ability to do so. When God calls, there is an invitation. God always gives us a choice in how we respond.

Richard Rohr ofm says that the good news which the calling God invites us to share is about relationships. He notes, “The Bible is for the sake of a love affair between God and the soul. . . One way to read the entire Bible is to note the gradual unveiling of our faces, the gradual creating of ‘persons’ capable of relationship with God and all others. . . It is relationship, ‘the face of the other,’ that transforms us, converts us, and gives us our deepest identity.”



In the Bible, we see God using the very wounded lives of very ordinary people.
~ Richard Rohr ofm

Today’s Psalm 138 gives us the comforting words as we fear our ability to share the good news in this way, “You Lord will fulfill your purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever” (Ps 138:8). God who calls us to love leads the way by never failing to give us steadfast love.

The other three readings this morning show how this happens in the lives of three people: Isaiah, Paul, and Peter. Each one is called, and each one knows that he cannot live up to what God expects. But, again, to quote Richard Rohr ofm, “In the Bible, we see God using the very wounded lives of very ordinary people. . . It’s not about becoming spiritual beings nearly as much as about becoming human beings. The biblical revelation is saying that we are already spiritual beings; we just don’t know it yet. The Bible tries to let us in on the secret, by revealing God in the ordinary.” Or to hear the same consoling words in another way, the Hasidic Rabbi, Menachem Mendel of Poland in the early 19th century, says simply, “Your holiness shall consist of being truly human, not angelic. God has plenty of angels.”

Our first reading describes the call of Isaiah, a very different description from the call of Jeremiah. Both Jeremiah and Isaiah protest their inadequacies, with Jeremiah saying “Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy” (Jer 1:6). Isaiah is much more dramatic, “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!” (Is 6:1).

We can more readily identify with the call of Jeremiah – the Lord God who calls him is gently encouraging and supportive, speaking



directly in an engaging conversation with Jeremiah in a quiet and calm place. In the call of Isaiah, God's robe fills the temple (the largest building the people of that time could imagine), attended by angels with six wings and surrounded by many voices, the shaking of the building, and much smoke. The Lord God simply puts out his hand and touches Jeremiah's mouth promising to give him the words he will need. However, one of the angels takes a live coal from the altar with tongs and touches Isaiah's mouth taking away his sin and guilt. Both prophets accept the call. God asks Isaiah, "Whom shall I send?" Isaiah answers, "Here I am, send me" (Is 6:8).

In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul tells us that "I am the least of the Apostles, unfit to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God" (1 Cor 15:9). He adds, "But by the grace of God, I am what I am" (1Cor 15:10). He describes the essence of the good news – that Christ died and was raised, appearing to the disciples (some of whom he names) and to the brothers and sisters (although he does not mention any women by name!).

In the Gospel of Luke, we have the story of the Simon and the two sons of Zebedee fishing all night and catching nothing. In Luke's version, this marks the beginning of the relationship between Jesus and the apostles – their call to become his followers. We hear an almost identical version of the story in the Gospel of John, but now it is after the resurrection when Jesus the Risen One encourages Simon, the two sons of Zebedee, and the other fishermen to put out their nets even though they had caught nothing all night. It would be interesting to spend more time exploring why the two Gospel writers use the same story in a very different context – one at the first call of the disciples (Luke) and one at their renewed call after the resurrection of Jesus (John). The timing



of the two stories does remind us that God does not call us at one moment in time, but the call is repeated over and over. God does not call us and then leave us alone to answer – we are in a relationship which is ongoing and reveals itself in every moment of our changing lives.

In Luke's story, we hear Simon cry out, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" Just as Isaiah and Paul had been given the comforting strength of God to answer their fears about being good enough, Jesus says to Simon Peter, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people" (Lk 5:10).

This story from Luke's Gospel is held within the embrace of Earth – the waters of Lake Gennesaret, the shore of the lake, the wooden boats, the woven nets, and the fish are intimately connected to the call of the disciples and the relationship between Jesus and the disciples. The lake and the "deep water" bring us back to the first story of creation. Elaine Wainwright rsm says so beautifully, "Our place is recognising that we are of Earth, from Earth, and that we will return to Earth. We are Earth-creatures just as Peter and his companions were fishers. Jesus took the word describing their occupation and shifted its focus from the fish of the Lake of Gennesaret to people. At this time as Earth-creatures, we are being called by the earthed-Jesus of the gospel to earth-people. We are discovering Jesus anew as we put out into the deep of our universe. We are being called to leave behind old ways of acting which ignore Earth's others and to find the new. The words of Jesus to Simon will accompany us, too: 'Do not be afraid'." I love that image – we are earth-people!

Today we have reason to rejoice that our God loves us enough to call us into relationship – relationship with the God who creates us and loves us, relationship with each other on our life’s journey, relationship with Earth with whom we are one, and relationship with ourselves as we move from fears about our unworthiness to trust in our giftedness.

The scripture scholar, Walter Brueggemann, teaches us this profound prayer:

You are the God who makes extravagant promises.
We relish your great promises of fidelity and presence and solidarity,
and we exude in them.
Only to find out, always too late,
that your promise always comes
in the midst of a hard, deep call to obedience.

You are the God who calls people like us,
and the long list of mothers and fathers before us,
who trusted the promise enough to keep the call.

So we give you thanks that you are a calling God,
who calls always to dangerous new places.
We pray enough of your grace and mercy among us
that we may be among those who believe your promises
enough to respond to your call.

We pray in the one who embodied your promise
and enacted your call, even Jesus. Amen.

We thank you, calling God, for calling us, for trusting us to be bearers of the good news, and for keeping your extravagant promises to us to be with us in steadfast love every step of the way!