

### “Two of a Kind”

The two readings we heard today could not be more different and yet more similar. The differences I think are obvious, but the similarities are not so much so. The Isaiah passage is a vision that he has of God and himself in the Temple in Jerusalem. In contrast the passage from Luke is Jesus and Peter on the shore of a Lake Gennesaret.<sup>1</sup> These are clearly very different scenes. Isaiah is encountering God and Peter is fishing. Isaiah also sees seraphim which are very frightening looking angels with six wings that look like something out of a horror movie. They are not at all like what we see in Renaissance paintings. Peter sees nothing he is unfamiliar with; only boats, fish, water and people.

What makes them similar is bound up in one word—theophany. Theophany is the fancy word which means the revelation of God to humans. Isaiah’s revelation is rather what we expect in scripture; expectations that have been built from the Book of Genesis onward. In some of these stories Abraham encounters God through mysterious rites and signs such as smoking pot and torch that consecrate a sacrifice and covenant.<sup>2</sup> There is also the angel that stays Abraham’s hand as he is about to sacrifice Isaac.<sup>3</sup> Maybe more familiar is the passage where Moses encounters God in the burning bush.<sup>4</sup> These are all theophanies of the miraculous sort where God speaks directly to a human.

Theophanies in the New Testament seem to happen to regular people and for the most part they are mediated by Jesus. In today’s scripture it is a group of commercial fisherman who after a fruitless night out on the sea are ordered by Jesus to go back out. Jesus’ entry into the boat might be compared to the hem of YHWH in the Temple. He has entered directly into the lives of the fishers. When they follow his orders they make an abundant catch of fish that almost sinks their boat.

Here is where the theophanies of Isaiah and Peter intersect. Peter’s response to the great catch of fish is to fall down at Jesus’ feet and say, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” This echoes Isaiah’s fear at encountering God when 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; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” Peter and Isaiah feel fear and shame at facing God in the Temple or in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Rather than embracing the encounter with the Divine they want to be away from it. This response is typical of the call stories of prophets. It seems essential that the prophet deny his worthiness to be a prophet in order to be worthy of the call. It is only after this confession of sinfulness that the Divine one, YHWH or

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<sup>1</sup> One of the alternate names for the Sea of Galilee, along with the Sea of Tiberius and Lake Tiberius, Lake Kinneret and Lake Kinnereth

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 15:1-15

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 22:1-19

<sup>4</sup> Exodus 3

Jesus, gives that person the commission of prophet. Then that person is instructed on what their mission will be.

In the case of Isaiah, he will go and speak to the people words of prophecy that they will not comprehend or understand because of their dull minds and stopped up ears. The exercise in futility will continue until cities and houses are empty and the land is uninhabited. But this barren land will be like a stump from which a new righteous people will come forth. Isaiah's mission must yield the desolation for without it the stump will not be revealed and the land will not be ready for the renewal that God desires.

Peter's commission is seemingly more positive, for he will fish for people. But just this little *pericope* illustrates the reality that doing all of the right things and putting all of his ingenuity and experience to work might yield nothing. It is only when he has Jesus literally on board with him that the fishing is productive.

Isaiah and Peter have tough roads ahead. But they are men of truth and humility. They take on tasks far beyond their abilities knowing that because God and Jesus have commissioned them they have help along the way.

We too are called by God into some form of ministry. We accept that call at our baptism and confirmation. Even if we have not discerned our call at those times it will come. It may not be as dramatic or cinematic as these two examples, but we receive calls nonetheless. The challenge is will we have the eyes to see and ears to hear or will we be dull and uncomprehending? The question may be even more blunt. Do we want to turn and be healed? The healing God offers will undoubtedly be difficult.

We must recognize the damage the world has done to our souls and psyches. We may not want to acknowledge there is any damage. We may think we are fine just the way we are. Better the devil we know than the angel we do not. We are comfortable in our current situations and we have to work to move beyond it. That is why I think that a lot of people, present company excepted, stop their spiritual maturing in their teens. The challenge is too hard and scary and unknowable. We have to trust in God and allow Jesus to enter our boat, and keep on trying even though we think we have been working at it without apparent success for a long time.

It is not easy and what's more the world will do its best to come you from taking up the challenge. The world will congratulate you on what you have accomplished. It may also distract you with the worldly accoutrement of success—possessions, money, power, and prestige. It will ask you why you should challenge yourself for the sake of God when you already have signs that you live in God's favor. Those signs are not signs from God they are distractions to keep us from going deeper and living into the life that God has been calling us to all along.

Open your eyes and ears to a vision of God that will overwhelm any sense of majesty you might think you have experienced. Let Jesus in the boat to direct your life. Don't wait because the call is now. When you hear it respond as Isaiah did and say "Here am I; send me!"