



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Epiphany 5 (C)
February 10, 2019

[RCL] Isaiah 6:1-8, [9-13]; Psalm 138; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11

Isaiah 6:1-8 (9-13)

The prophet has a vision of angelic worship of the Lord on a throne, and the angels' words appear in our liturgy today. These particular angels, seraphim, possess six wings, only two being used for flying, and the others for covering themselves. As they called out to one another, the doorposts shook. This model of worship is breathtaking: so loud and forceful that the building is shaking! Isaiah recognizes his failings and fears he will die because he has seen God. Considering Moses was only allowed to see the back of the Almighty, this was not an irrational fear (cf. Exodus 33:20). Purified by the live coal applied to his lips, when the Lord asks, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" the prophet, apparently without hesitation, volunteers. Worship of God and recognizing God's greatness led to moving out and being sent out of the temple into the community on God's mission. God as object of worship, as initiator of mission, so vast that the temple only holds the hem of God's garment, and whose glory is everywhere in the world: this is the picture provided by the prophet.

- Does your image of God align with Isaiah's? In what ways is your understanding of God similar or different from this one on the throne?
- When do you recall responding to an invitation with "Here I am! Send Me!"?

Psalm 138

This hymn of praise expresses gratitude for God's faithful responsiveness and protection. The temple is mentioned, as it was in Isaiah, and was the place where humans ritually interacted with God in the Hebrew tradition. The lowly, which might be considered those who are marginalized in our culture, are cared for by God. In society, the wealthy and famous are valued, but God values all and does not abandon anyone ever. If humans are truly the work of God's hands, then they have intrinsic value to God, and therefore we are all invited into God's ways and purposes.

- Can you imagine a world where all the kings of the earth sing of the ways of the Lord?
- Who are the lowly? What would trust in the steadfast love of God look like toward the lowly? How might you be instrumental in showing that love?

I Corinthians 15:1-11

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. Paul is reminding the church at Corinth of the fundamentals of the good news in this passage. This is also a testimony to the number of actual witnesses to the Resurrected Christ. Paul also leads with his failing of having persecuted the church. This gives hope to all of us who are less than proud of some of the choices we have made at various times. Events and experiences that have been sources of shame and pain, when transformed by the Living Christ, can be sources of healing for others. We enter into the suffering of all humanity when we authentically are present to our own and are willing to lead with our true selves. Jesus suffered as one fully human, out of a love so profound as to be incomprehensible. This is an invitation for all of us, to proclaim the Good News with transparency and great love.

- Is there any significance to the number of people who saw Jesus after the Resurrection? Why?
- Is there something in your history that has been a source of shame that might be a resource for healing for others?

Luke 5:1-11

Simon Peter responds to Jesus' direction with logic, pointing out that the nets were not empty because they were lazy. In fact, they had worked all night, but on the tail of this statement, he says that if Jesus says so, they will fish again. Maybe Simon Peter was warning Jesus that nothing would happen, since there just weren't any fish in that part of the lake at the moment, and he did not want Jesus to be disappointed by empty nets. In the same way that Isaiah said, "I am a man of unclean lips," Simon said, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" Jesus does not tell Simon to stop sinning, but rather to not be afraid. An experienced fisherman witnesses a miracle of fish and is terrified. The impact is immediate abandonment of his boat, his way of life, and all he knew, to follow Jesus. This is risky behavior. This is far riskier than letting down nets that will likely be empty when pulled up.

- Jesus used fish to "catch" a fisherman. How were you caught?
- Have you noticed an invitation to abandon a boat of some kind in order to follow Jesus? What would that look like?

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