

February 7, 2010; Epiphany 5C

Lections: Isaiah 6:1-8, (9-13); Ps. 138; 1Corin. 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11

What kind of miracle?

“I can’t listen to this anymore,” he said. “I need some hope right now.” On Thursday evening after a bowl of lentil soup, some bread and a bit of cheese, seven members of the new diocesan peacemaking group had carefully and exhaustively noted the levels and places of violence in church and culture. We had said much about living in a land of unclean lips, owning our individual failures to change much. Some of us were new to the group, exploring the ground of this vocation; others had been at it for a long time. The speaker, tired and disheartened by the perspective of bleak, yearned for at least one clear success story; he wanted to fish from the other side of the boat lest the weight of all the troubles break the nets.

If I am honest, there are days that I feel that way too. Despite lots of hard work in churchland, much is less than perfect. This temple/parish and the temple/parish of the world are full of sadness, broken-ness and struggle; I can’t listen long to the stories of Haiti before my eyes are filling with tears. Longing for a glimpse of the heavenly realms where new beginnings are made possible through divine aid, I need some hope. We all do. We want to be in that number when the saints go marching in. We want to steal away to Jesus and have a sweet chariot take us to the place where there is only good news – and rest. That’s one reason why many of us come to church, to experience hope in text and song, in bread and wine, in the company of those who depend on God for renewal. We want some miracles too, some sense that the abundance of woe and our poor labors are not the end of the story.

If we look closely at the gospel story we might see something more than we have before. After a day of struggle with little or no yield, Jesus addresses the fishermen – they are not yet disciples – and asks them to keep on working, to go out again. Suddenly they haul in a new catch of fish, reversing their previous experience. This is a pivotal moment, I think, and not just a message to keep fishing, try another side, go deeper. Peter does a strange thing. He pulls ashore with his boat now full and walks away from it. And changes the course of his life. Had his willingness to allow Jesus to teach from his boat given him another way to think about the purpose of his life? Had he seen that simply getting ‘more’ was not likely to give him joy and satisfaction?

We are told that whenever we read of fish in the gospels we are reading about the miracle of sustenance for the new community. What will sustain them, and us, is relationship, being drawn together to hear and see what Jesus is really offering here. The miracle is in us, in our turning around, owning the sin in ourselves, the ways in which we have wanted and pursued the wrong things. Lent is almost here and we are Isaiahs and Peters who want to be sent and who need a bit of a scrub.

To feed each other with hope is no small thing. It is what we need to keep working for glimpses of the kingdom, the kin-dom of those who are willing to be taught a new way. One of the lures for the Thursday evening peace group was the promise of a documentary

video about *The Imam and the Pastor*. Set in a small town in Nigeria where Christian and Muslim bloodshed had become a problem, the film powerfully shows a new way of hope, a moving forward toward peace. A decision by two men from different traditions changed them and those around them. Working on forgiveness, building trust slowly, they were caught up in reconciliation in a remarkable way. Leaving the work of only their own behind they chose to build a new relationship. The imam of the mosque and the pastor of a Pentecostal Christian church became friends. It is clear that the process has not been easy. “There were times when I wanted to bring a pillow with me to smother him,” says the pastor, openly repenting of his difficulty in releasing his need for revenge for the violence that cost him his right hand. “And then when I went away I loved him so much I wanted to see him again.” They are doing new work together now, drawing in other Muslims and Christians. They travel all over Nigeria, their wives – one in hajab and one not- chatting in the back seat of the van. We hear portions of the Koran and sections of scripture, useful for teaching about the new boat of hope they are sailing. Transformation in these two and those they have touched gives me hope.

I had just finished a book set in the violence of Nigeria; I am reading a new book about the African-American history in Canada. I am glad that Thursday night ended with hope, a fresh and new example of the power of God to work in unlikely places. I know now I needed to see the film as much as anyone.

At the end of this week a new batch of people crossing denominational lines and weary of winter will head off to New Orleans for another rebuild. The worship service on Friday night which commissions us will offer us a chance to again trust God with a ‘radical freedom that asks us to leave everything’ so that we might find that which we really seek. Great timing in light of the texts this week. We have to go as empty as those who lost so much; only then can we depend on God to sustain us.

Great timing might be at hand for you as well. Lent will invite us into spiritual inventory, a faith project of listening and learning, of crossing into new territory with others. You don’t necessarily need to leave home to find the kind of catch Jesus is calling us toward. It may be some new kind of miracle; it may be a turn around in our work lives, our faith in God, the trajectory we are willing to move toward. I have every confidence that the One who calls us will give us hope for breakfast. Amen+

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