

Epiphany 5C  
Isaiah 6:1-13; Luke 5:1-11  
February 9, 2025

*“The Vocation of a Christian”*  
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*Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, <sup>2</sup>he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup>He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. <sup>4</sup>When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” <sup>5</sup>Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” <sup>6</sup>When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. <sup>7</sup>So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. <sup>8</sup>But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” <sup>9</sup>For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; <sup>10</sup>and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” <sup>11</sup>When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.*

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This morning, the lectionary has gifted us with two really wonderful texts! In fact, I like both of them so much that I’ve decided to preach two separate full-length sermons – one on each of them. I’m just kidding. I can see the panic on your faces thinking you’ll have to sit through two of these! I do really love these texts and, as we’ll see, it was no accident that they were both prescribed for the same day.

The first reading, the one Christina shared moments ago from the prophet Isaiah, is truly awe-inspiring. Imagine the deep and resonant voice of James Earl Jones reading it: “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple.” It gives me goosebumps! And then there are the flying seraphs that sing around God as the very ground beneath them shakes. The poor petrified prophet cries out in humility and terror before one of the winged beings touches his lips with a hot coal from the alter. Then God says, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And the quivering prophet bravely responds, “Here am I; send me!”

And then there’s the Gospel lection from Luke. It’s a wonderful story and it starts with Jesus teaching on the lakeshore. The crowd was getting too close for comfort so he stepped into a boat with a fisherman named Simon Peter. He continued teaching the crowd from the safety of the boat and when he’d finished, he instructed Peter to move out into the deep water. After a long night of fishless fishing, Jesus told Peter to let down his nets again. To Peter’s surprise, the catch was so immense that the nets began to break! Reinforcements joined them in the deep water, filling both boats with fish to the point of sinking. Not unlike the prophet in the Isaiah text, a petrified Peter pleaded, “Go away from me Lord!” But Jesus just reassured him, saying, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” And when they finally got their fish infested fleet to the shore, they left it all and followed Jesus. What a great story!

As I’m sure you’ve noticed, both of these stories share certain elements in common. They both feature a being who seems larger-than-life. In Isaiah, it’s God, and in Luke, it’s obviously Jesus. Both stories make visible something that can really only be imagined—the throne room of God, in the first reading; and, apparently, all the fish in the sea, in the second. Both stories also feature a far less impressive secondary character who, in terror and amazement, cries out in fear—the prophet Isaiah and the disciple Peter. As interesting as these parallels are, there’s one more feature they share in common and that’s the feature I’m most interested in today. These are both “call stories.”

If you didn't know, all ministers have a "call story." You have to have a call story and you'd better be good at telling it – the account of how you received your calling to ministry. In the United Church of Christ, you have to convince a group within your local church that you've been called to ministry. They, in turn, recommend you to an association or conference Committee on Ministry. You tell them your call story and if they discern a valid call, you begin the process that culminates, usually several years later, in ordination. The minister's call story is a big deal, as it was for both the prophet Isaiah and the apostle Peter. While we may not all have a call story, we have all been called – laypeople and clergy alike – into this particular faith and family of God's people. We have responded to that calling by committing to live and love and serve together to further Jesus' vision of the kingdom of God, here and now and for all. That is our vocation as Christians.

The truth is, you may also have been called to be a teacher, a parent, a builder, doctor, dentist, postal worker, fire fighter, chiropractor, or any other number of things. These other callings will change as our lives do. Eventually, parents may be called to be grandparents or simply to be support for children that no longer require parenting. The doctor or the postal worker may one day feel called to retire. The teacher may feel called to work with animals instead of children. These callings will change. Our Christian calling will not. As long as we identify with this faith, we are still called. And our vocation remains the same: to live and love and serve together to further Jesus' vision of the kingdom of God, here and now and for all.

An old story is told of King Henry of Bavaria. In the eleventh century King Henry grew tired of court life and the pressures of being a monarch. He made an application to Prior Richard, the head of a local monastery, asking to be accepted as a contemplative and spend the rest of his life in the monastery. "Your majesty" said Prior Richard, "Do you understand that the pledge here is one of obedience? That will be hard because you have been a king." "I understand" said Henry. "The rest of my life I will be obedient to you, as Christ leads you." "Then I will tell you what to do,"

said Prior Richard. “Go back to your throne and serve faithfully in the place where God has put you.”<sup>1</sup>

All told, we may have many callings in life, but our Christian calling remains the same throughout: to live and love and serve together to further Jesus’ vision of the kingdom of God, here and now and for all. And it’s in light of *that* calling, our Christian calling, that we live out all our other callings, all our other identities.

According to the teachings of Jesus, the kingdom of God is the absence of oppression and division; it’s wholeness and enough and justice for everyone; it’s the presence of peace and unity; and all people are welcome – from the least, to the sick, to those on the margins. Jesus’ dream of the kingdom starkly contrasted the empire of his day, which thrived on oppression and division; where wholeness and enough and justice were reserved for a few; peace and the illusion of unity came at the high price of victory; and the least, the sick, and those on the margins stayed in their places while empire devoured ever more lands and people to feed the voracious appetites of those in power.

The calling of a Christian, the pursuit of the vision of Jesus, has never been very popular with empire. They are two opposing visions of life on earth. Yes, life on earth, not in heaven. Heaven or paradise is not the same thing as the kingdom of God as Jesus understood it. Heaven is referred to as the future reward of the righteous. Jesus didn’t talk very much about heaven. The kingdom of God was Jesus’ vision for life on earth and he talked about it constantly. That is the vision that we as his followers are called to pursue. That is our vocation. That is our Christian calling.

Let us live and love and serve together to further Jesus’ vision of the kingdom of God, here and now and for all. And may that kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> “Henry of Bavaria,” Storiesforpreaching.com: <https://storiesforpreaching.com.au/category/sermonillustrations/calling/>.