

## eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, February 7, 2010

A Ministry of Christ the Redeemer Church, San Marcos, Texas

### **Make a New Beginning**

**Year C**

**RCL**

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The Lectionary Readings for the week:

Isaiah 6:1-8, [9-13]

Psalm 138

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Luke 5:1-11

If life is a book, each day is a new blank page upon which we have the opportunity to make a NEW BEGINNING. I have heard it said that "Inside each life is a book yet to be written." Each of us could write an autobiography. I love listening to the life stories of others. Remarkably, I have never met a person who cannot teach ME something. Once again, it is that ATTITUDE thing. What would your life story "say"? Which genre would it occupy? Would it be a "mystery", a "comedy" or a "French farce"? (I find many "autobiographies" to be acts of FICTION.) There are LOTS of pages that I would like to omit or tear from my "life story". Unfortunately, the only way we can amend the past is to learn the lessons and move on. Our life story is still being written. Every hour of every day is an opportunity to make a new beginning. My God is the "God of new beginnings." If "your idea" of God is a punitive parent who never forgives and only seeks to demean and punish, then, your God is not my God and I pity you. God loves ALL his children and, since God created us ALL, we are ALL loved. It all depends on my attitude toward God, life and its opportunities, doesn't it? Have I ever failed? You bet. I've failed as much as I have "succeeded". What makes us able to keep going when others stand frozen in fear and trepidation? Faith will not stand still. Faith is the "Energizer Bunny" of Christianity...it keeps on going and going and going. Insanity is doing the same thing and expecting a different outcome. Faith allows us to achieve the "impossible dream". Faith will be tested continually in our lives. A deep mystery of Christianity is that faith has to be ACTIVE and the ACTION leads to even greater faith. IF one wishes greater faith, USE WHAT WE HAVE and let God give us greater faith. A new beginning is the gift of a gracious and loving God. Make a new beginning, start fresh and keep swinging for the fences.

**Isaiah 6:1-8, [9-13]**

***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. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said:***

***"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory."***

***The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: "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!"***

***Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"***

***[And he said, "Go and say to this people:***

***'Keep listening, but do not comprehend;  
keep looking, but do not understand.'***

***Make the mind of this people dull,  
and stop their ears,  
and shut their eyes,  
so that they may not look with their eyes,  
and listen with their ears,  
and comprehend with their minds,  
and turn and be healed."***

***Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said:***

***"Until cities lie waste  
without inhabitant,  
and houses without people,  
and the land is utterly desolate;  
until the LORD sends everyone far away,  
and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land.***

***Even if a tenth part remain in it,  
it will be burned again,  
like a terebinth or an oak  
whose stump remains standing  
when it is felled."***

***The holy seed is its stump.]***

I often find it humorous and intriguing how I can read a scripture a thousand times without seeing and, suddenly, a word or phrase will leap from the pages like finding a nugget in a well-mined mountain stream. Such was the sentence "The holy seed is its stump." It is a gift to "see a world in a grain of sand." What

we think is the end of our lives is but the remains of a former existence that has the potential for a new beginning...a stump. The “seed” must die so that the plant can sprout? (Is this a foretelling of the Christ story?) The biggest difference between “mountain (blue berry) cedar” and “red-berry cedar” (besides the color of the berries) is that, when you cut off a mountain cedar tree below the limbs, it soon dies. In contrast, when you cut off a red-berry cedar below its limbs, it will “sucker” and put out new shoots and you will have a lot of new trees to contend with. God is like that: we think we have been pruned back until we almost die but, by faith in the grace of God, new life is in our future. God “prunes” us so that we can start over and thrive. We may lose our jobs, our homes or even our lives but, God is in charge of everything and gradually we may come to realize that, what we thought was the end, is an opportunity to start over. As I think back on life, I can easily recall numerous incidents when it seemed hopeless to go on. My wife once sent me a “greeting card” in the midst of such an episode. The card read: “If the sky rains lemons, make lemonade.” Another word for “faith” could be “perseverance”. What makes us keep going when the odds seem stacked against us? From my study of scripture, I have gleaned one consistent “truth”: the only “thing” we can change in this life is our ATTITUDE about life and circumstances. Has that been your experience as well? Isaiah was changed by a vision in the Temple. What will it take to change us? Every tragedy in our lives can give us HOPE if we look upward and onward toward the “prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus”. Isaiah’s “voice” comes ringing through the ages: “Don’t give up. Every call is a challenge and requires us to get out of our comfort zone. We encounter God when we leave our comfort zone and venture in faith into the unknown. Don’t worry. God will meet us there because God is already there waiting for us to catch up.” Our “stumps” are numerous and our opportunity is great. After every storm comes restoration. Believe God and look for a new beginning. Isaiah believed God and prevailed. The good news is: so can you and I.

## **Psalm 138 Page 793, BCP**

*Confitebor tibi*

1

***I will give thanks to you, O LORD, with my whole heart; \*  
before the gods I will sing your praise.***

2

***I will bow down toward your holy temple  
and praise your Name, \*  
because of your love and faithfulness;***

3

***For you have glorified your Name \*  
and your word above all things.***

4

***When I called, you answered me; \****

3

- 5 **you increased my strength within me.**
- 6 **All the kings of the earth will praise you, O LORD, \*  
when they have heard the words of your mouth.**
- 7 **They will sing of the ways of the LORD, \*  
that great is the glory of the LORD.**
- 8 **Though the LORD be high, he cares for the lowly; \*  
he perceives the haughty from afar.**
- 9 **Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you keep me safe; \*  
you stretch forth your hand against the fury of my enemies;  
your right hand shall save me.**
- 10 **The LORD will make good his purpose for me; \*  
O LORD, your love endures for ever;  
do not abandon the works of your hands.**

The underlined words are reflexive of David's "Twenty-third Psalm". Isn't it interesting how a recurrent thought of salvation, restoration and deliverance permeate the psalms? The psalms have been honored for many centuries primarily because they reflect our humanity and our common struggles. When in depression or grief and feeling alone, read the Psalms. When in need of wisdom, read Proverbs. A lot of the psalms were written in the depths of depression and hopelessness. Have you ever felt this way? Come on, be honest. Each time we feel this way, we should look for a "growth opportunity". For every door that closes, God opens another. Often, our choice is like that show in which the contestant was asked to choose door number one, door number two or take what was in Monty's hand. "Choose wisely, grasshopper." The psalmist knew that God had created him for purpose. What is the reason that you and I were created? If we don't know the purpose, how can we know that we are fulfilling our purpose? Are we to succumb to our fear, our doubt and our "fate" OR press on in faith? We are the "works of God's hands". God "don't make no junk". Sometimes, it is easier to press ahead than it is to turn back. Are we like dogs who eat their vomit or washed pigs who hurry to wallow in the mud? That is what Jesus likened those who heard the "good news" and did not accept it for salvation. In faith, we can only stand still in life for a time, rest and then, press on. Success is often just around the corner waiting for us to choose to keep going. The Holy Spirit whispers, "I will increase your strength within you. Keep on keeping on. Great things lie ahead for you. Trust me. YOU can make a new beginning." The "worst" outcome that can happen for the saved is a home with the Father so why do we tarry in fear and inaction? Through faith, the psalmist persevered and made a new beginning and so can we. Trust God, do

the next thing and make a new beginning.

### **1 Corinthians 15:1-11**

**I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you--unless you have come to believe in vain.**

**For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them--though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.**

I have to believe that the Apostle Paul must have faced failure, heartache and depression numerous times during his life. These are his bona fides for why he kept going. These words were written to give us a reason for persevering. It is an honest appraisal of his struggles. He REMINDED us about the gift of His life that Jesus paid for us all. Then, he asked them whether they had believed in vain. Have we believed in vain? What has our faith in God enabled us to resist, change or accomplish? Faith pushed Paul to continually risk his life to “hand” off or “pass on” the gospel to others. As we should be conduits of God’s love, Paul lived it. The “proof” of having received and utilized the good news of salvation is ACTION and a change of ATTITUDE. Paul could have chosen to go live in a cave and live miserably alone. Instead, he chose to spread the good news of salvation that he had received on the road to Damascus, risk his life and empower others to make new beginnings. He was a living example of the HOPE, LOVE and GRACE that is available to us all. What was the hallmark of Paul’s life? Paul never gave up despite storms, shipwrecks, serpents, imprisonments or beatings. Most of us will never experience these types of challenges in our lives but, we will have opportunity to overcome other incidences of loss, fear, depression and anger. Paul says, “If God has allowed me to persevere and succeed then, so can YOU.” Did Paul lie? Did God lie? Have we believed in vain? We must press on, grow, experience and trust that God will give us new opportunities and new beginnings.

### **Luke 5:1-11**

**Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were**

**washing their nets. 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. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. 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. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; 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." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.**

For your edification and education, I offer the following definition of the "lake of Gennesaret" in this passage:

*The Sea of Galilee, also Lake of Gennesaret, Lake Kinneret or Sea of Tiberias , located near the Golan Heights, is the largest freshwater lake in Israel, and it is approximately 33 miles in circumference, about 13 miles long and 8 miles wide. The lake has a total area of 166 km<sup>2</sup>, and a maximum depth of approximately 141 feet. At 209 meters below sea level, it is the lowest freshwater lake on Earth and the second-lowest lake in the world (after the Dead Sea, a saltwater lake). The Kinneret is situated deep in the Jordan Great Rift Valley, the valley caused by the separation of the African and Arabian Plates and is fed partly by underground springs although its main source is the Jordan River which flows through it from north to south. Consequently the area is subject to earthquakes and, in the past, volcanic activity. This is evident by the abundant basalt and other igneous rocks that define the geology of the Galilee region. (from Wikipedia)*

As I read this passage, I can almost smell the lake water (freshwater), the nets and the body odor of the fishermen who had worked all night in vain. Was this a chance meeting between Jesus and Peter? Was Jesus unknown to Peter prior to this event? Was it the "preaching" that preceded the "fishing" that caused Peter to respect Jesus? Did Peter go fishing just to be nice to Jesus? Did he

really believe that Jesus could catch fish when he, a “professional” fisherman, had failed? Imagine that you had been out on the lake all night fishing, had caught nothing, had just hung and repaired your nets and this Rabbi wants to go fishing? What went through the minds of the other men who manned the fishing boats? Did they think that Peter AND Jesus had both lost their senses? To me, this is faith that is “perfected” in results. “Nothing ventured, nothing gained” is a popular aphorism. Was this what motivated Peter and his fellow fishermen? Jesus pressed them into action, they obeyed and the catch was overwhelming. FAITH caused ACTION that changed their ATTITUDES. Because of the size of the catch, Peter realized the divinity and power of Jesus. Is this how it works for us? Are we “faith-based” or is our faith “results-based”? Do we believe in Jesus because our “faith has produced results”? (I can’t help but wonder what happened to all those fish. Were they left to rot? Were they sold to pay for ministry?) Peter was a businessman who owned his own fleet. Archeologists have discovered and unearthed the house of Peter. It was a huge house for its time. Peter left his home, his business and his family to follow Jesus. After the crucifixion, Peter went fishing because it was what he knew how to do. Before he encountered Jesus, Peter THOUGHT that his “purpose” in life was to fish and support his family. Even Peter had to be “reminded” of the faith that made him follow Jesus. Once convinced of the possibility of “life after death” and that Jesus was the Messiah of promise, Peter became the pillar of the early Church. This is a tale of faith that was tested, faith that waned (rooster crowed thrice) and faith that made a new beginning. Have WE believed in vain? What will it take to compel us to action as a result of our faith? Do we need to be “reminded”? God says, “Take up your bed AND WALK.” “Faith without works is dead, being alone.” Faith comes to life when it leads to action which leads to more faith. Perhaps, what we must do to get more faith is to get into action? At the end of every loss or failure lies an open door with God inside beckoning us to even greater acts of faith as we make a new beginning.