

Daily Office Devotional, Tuesday, January 12, 2021
The week of the first Sunday after Epiphany
The Rev David W. Perkins, Th.D.

Daily Office Lectionary Readings

AM Psalm 5, 6; PM Psalm 10, 11

Isa. 40:25-31; Eph. 1:15-23; Mark 1:14-28

Morning Prayer, Rite 2, page 75, Book of Common Prayer

Evening Prayer, Rite 2, page 115, Book of Common Prayer

Compline (Night Prayer), Page 127, Book of Common Prayer

Daily Office Gospel, Mark 1:14-28

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’

16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. 17And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fish for people.’ 18And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

21 They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. 22They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. 23Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, 24and he cried out, ‘What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.’ 25But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be silent, and come out of him!’ 26And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. 27They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, ‘What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.’ 28At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

David's Reflections

The German poet, Wolfgang Borchert, wrote:
A lighthouse I would be
In wind and night--
For cod and smelt,
For every boat--Yet I myself
Am but a ship in distress!

Today's Gospel puts before us a word dreaded by many in our church, the E word, evangelism. Jesus called four fishermen to become fishers, gathers of people with him; then, Jesus immediately went fishing in the synagogue on the Sabbath and freed a man oppressed by an evil spirit.

Borchert's poem gives us a different metaphor for evangelism, a lighthouse. Perhaps we could combine the two metaphors and speak of ourselves as called to fish but being more like a fishing boat caught in the darkness and weather and in distress rather than like the shining light of the lighthouse. We might be looking for that lighthouse—someone's example or encouragement or the voice of the Spirit or a word from Scripture.

Few ideas strike more terror in our hearts than talking about our faith with another person. Some Episcopalians seem in the grip of the illusion that we don't need to share, that everyone in some way already believes. They have a Little Bo Peep theology of evangelism, "leave them alone, and they'll come home."

Yet, if Jesus and his followers can be taken seriously as models, they did not assume that people were to be left alone. Rather, they subscribed to the theology that God is gatherer: fishing gathers fish; harvesting gathers grain; shepherding gathers sheep, lighthouses gather, witnessing gathers people unto a loving God.

The church exists to share worship, serve, and share the message of Christ with those not yet having come to faith or those whose faith has lapsed or gone awry; and, we are convinced that people are at risk apart from faith in Christ. Our stance as individuals cannot be, "I do not know how to talk about my faith." Rather, our stance must be, "I will find ways to talk about my faith, because the people I know and love live at risk apart from faith and I love them."

We have no way of knowing what happens to individuals apart from Christ if they pass from this life. We can wish that all would be gathered unto God, but the

New Testament writers, although envisioning God's ultimate triumph as savior, also put themselves at risk seeking to share the message of God's saving love in Christ. Am I willing to put people at risk by making a theological assumption that relieves me of responsibility of risking my personal safety for sharing with them? Better to put myself at risk for their sakes.

My contention is that debates about the fate of unbelievers at death lose sight of one important issue. Even if every individual ultimately ends up with God, what about tomorrow, next week, next month? People in our community, on our block, live without God's love and forgiveness today. They live without Jesus' loving and active presence today. They live without the grace of the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Eucharist today. They live deprived of loving Christian community. Their children are growing up without the benefit of the teaching of Jesus today.

Can we live with contentment so long as they are apart from God's love? Our witness can introduce them into the experience of realities central to our lives, realities of love, forgiveness, and transformation without which our own lives would be bankrupt.

Our journey includes sharing. Jesus says, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Ours is to follow, to trust, and to resolve. Ours is to live with the intent of finding ways to share and of living into that sharing. Otherwise, our following of Jesus will be less wholehearted than we really want to be. How can we refuse to follow him into this place of sharing?

What is unique about our concept of sharing is that we hope to bring people with us into the worship experience of the community. There the story of salvation gets told each Sunday in the Great Thanksgiving. There Christ becomes present in the feel and taste of bread and in the smell and taste of wine. We are fishers, seeking to gather people into community, not cowhands alone on the prairie roping and branding. Ours is a corporate understanding of witness and sharing. We are members of the Body when separate from each other, hoping and praying that those we encounter will become members of the Body with us and seeking to introduce them to the life of that body as a vital aspect of their coming to Christ.

I would rather be a lighthouse than a ship in distress. Wouldn't you? God gathered me to Godself and to the community through others. I can cooperate with God in that great mission of gathering others to God's saving love. Is it not

fascinating that Jesus' first public act after his baptism was to gather people into community by the calling of the four?

Collect of the Day, First Sunday after the Epiphany: The Baptism of our Lord

Father in heaven, who at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit: Grant that all who are baptized into his Name may keep the covenant they have made, and boldly confess him as Lord and Savior; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.* (BCP, 214)

A Collect for Guidance

O God, whose Son Jesus is the good shepherd of your people; Grant that when we hear his voice we may know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he leads; who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.* (BCP 100)

For stewardship of creation

O merciful Creator, your hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature: Make us always thankful for your loving providence; and grant that we, remembering the account that we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your good gifts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 259)

A Prayer for Light

Lighten our darkness, we beseech you, O Lord; and by your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of your only Son, Jesus Christ, *Amen.* (BCP, 111)

A Collect for Mission

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 280)