

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Isaiah 6:1-13, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, Luke 5:1-11

A commitment is something that holds us to our word, makes us accountable to someone or something, and urges us to complete whatever our responsibilities might be.

Our Gospel lesson for today brings us a story of commitment that still somewhat shocks and surprises us, no matter how many times we have heard it. A few words from Jesus, a strange catch of fish, and some fishermen are ready to follow Jesus wherever He asks them to go. We are committed, or so we say, to following God.

So why does this story shock us so much? Yes, we have commitments, but perhaps they do not require as much from us as we usually think. Think carefully, when did we make an actual sacrifice, an act of giving something up in order to better follow God's will? When was the last time we did something we did not want to do, because God prompted us to do so?

When did we last do something that made us uncomfortable, something we were nervous about, because we could hear God's voice leading us in that direction? Are we really committed to following God? If we answer yes, we may find ourselves face to face with a situation that forces us to discover just how committed we are.

The Gospel reading for today says the crowd was pressing in upon Jesus to hear the word of God. Why were they pressing in on him? What were they so eager to hear? The people in Jesus'

day had many struggles. They were occupied by the Romans, unable to live freely in their own land. Most probably had jobs that allowed them to just make ends meet, but it was surely a struggle to provide for the family. They were faithful Jews, but were faced with corruption from their leaders. These people wanted a Messiah. They needed hope. They needed to see that God truly cared for them, even through all their trials. So they pressed in upon Jesus.

Perhaps it was their vulnerable state that made them so willing to follow where God commanded. Perhaps it was their upbringing, an inner sense that when God calls, a person responds. Have we lost some of that inner-prompting, that inner-understanding that when God speaks, we should answer?

Are we less committed today than people were in Jesus' time? Jesus spoke two words, "follow me", and found ready and willing disciples. If Jesus came to us today, could we make the same decision? Could we leave friends, family, careers, comforts of shelter, not knowing where our next meal would come from?

Through the sacrament of the Eucharist we have a ritual of commitment between ourselves and Christ. Jesus said to his disciples, "take this cup and drink. Do this to remember me".

When we take the cup and the bread, every time we take communion together, we are renewing our commitment. We are saying, once again, that we are committed to our relationship with God. God says, "Remember me" through the sacrament of the Eucharist. God promises to prepare a place for us, and to return to us, and to receive us as God's own beloved. We have a part to play too, we have a commitment to keep by sharing in the communion meal. We promise our faithfulness. We promise our steadfastness. We promise to turn to no one other than

Jesus.

How true are we to our commitments? Undoubtedly, life is sometimes a struggle. There are many obstacles and setbacks, and keeping our commitment to God is hard work. Yet, there are blessings. God is faithful, and through the covenant of the cup Holy Communion, God promises to stand by us, to make a place for us in heaven, God's home. We must only accept *this* cup, and keep our commitment too. If we drink from this cup, and eat of this loaf, we are making a commitment. Are we ready to do our part?

Perhaps today God doesn't call us to do things as drastic as leaving our lives at the seaside to follow an unknown man. Or maybe God does urge us to be so bold, but we have just become too sure that God would not ask these things of us. Former Bishop Mark Genge once said: "Don't look to see where your gifts are to know what God wants you to do, look where your fears and doubts are. This is where God will call you".

The Bible is filled with person after person called into unlikely situations. Aaron was a gifted speaker, and Moses was slow of tongue, but God still called Moses to lead the people to freedom.

David was a shepherd boy, but God called him to fight a giant.

Sarah was advanced in years, but God called her to bear a son that would begin a great line of God's servants. Paul was a strict Jew, persecuting Christians, but God called Paul to spread the Gospel to non-believing Gentiles. Mary was an unwed virgin, but she was chosen to bear the Christ child. Simon Peter was a fisherman, but God called him to be the rock upon which the church would be founded. God calls us from all places to fill unlikely roles. However, just as God provided for Moses and David, Sarah and Paul, Mary and Peter, God will provide for us.

God challenges us and push us, but God only calls us to do

what we can bear with His help.

So, to what task is God asking us to commit? Are we ready to accept the covenant God places before us? From the prophet Isaiah we read, “I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, here am I; send me”. We don’t know if Isaiah was equipped for the task God set before him, or if he was confident and secure. We only know that Isaiah was ready. He was committed to answering God with a simple “here I am, send me”. He didn’t put conditions on how he would follow God. He didn’t ask questions or try to get out of the job. He committed himself to following God’s task. Here I am, send me.

Let us, like Isaiah, respond by saying, here I am God, send me.

God has promised to be with us. Be strong and bold, follow God wherever He calls, just as the fishermen did so many years ago.

AMEN.