



Sunday 9th February 2025

Epiphany 5

Isaiah 6:1-8

Luke 5:1-11

The Rev'd Canon Jenny Wilson

In the name of God, creating, redeeming, sanctifying, ... Amen.

The day after the inauguration of the President of the United States of America, the Bishop of Washington, the Right Rev'd Mariann Budd spoke to the congregation in the Washington Cathedral imploring the President to treat vulnerable groups of people with mercy.

Reflecting in a conversation with a journalist, in the days that followed, Bishop Mariann Budd gave some insight into where the hope that her words inspired came from, where her inspiration to speak as she did, came from. She said this:

I was taught by someone who was taught by [the theologian] Karl Barth, and he was very fond of [Karl Barth's famous words, about "preaching with the Bible in one hand, and the newspaper in the other."]. I think there are two ways that I believe about that, one very pastoral and the other more public-minded. I had a professor say once—and I believe this with all my heart—that if you know what people are thinking about when they're coming into church on Sunday morning, it's very important to acknowledge that. So, if something's happened in your immediate surroundings, the country, or the world and it's on people's minds, he said, you just need to acknowledge it. That doesn't mean it can be the topic of your sermon, but somewhere make space for that.¹

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Bishop Mariann Budd's professor said. If there is a truth around it is better to name it.

Jesus is the consummate namer of the truth. He brings the truth to light through questions and actions and conversations. Truth could not hide in his presence. For that was the only way for the freedom and life of God to bless.

In our reading this morning from our Gospel for this year, the Gospel according to St Luke, we are at the shore of a lake and Peter and his friends are fishing. Only there are no fish. There is a beautiful scene after Jesus' resurrection in

¹ <https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-new-yorker-interview/why-bishop-mariann-budde-wanted-to-speak-to-donald-trump?>

John's gospel where Peter has not caught any fish and Jesus names that overtly, "You have no fish have you?" we can almost hear the gentle tone in his voice as he names this truth. I imagine that same gentle tone in this scene. He sees the truth and guides Peter to the way to engage with it. Not judgmental not even strongly directive, just kind and clear.

Jesus has been teaching a crowd from Simon's boat, the crowd has been pressing on him, so this was the best place for him to speak to them. When he has finished speaking, he says to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' Simon answers, 'Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.' When they have done this, they catch so many fish that their nets are beginning to break. ... When Simon Peter sees it, he falls down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' Then Jesus says to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.' When they have brought their boats to shore, they leave everything and follow him.

Jesus names the truth before him, a fisherman with no fish, and then when there is an amazing catch of fish, that fisherman, our patron saint soon to be named Peter, glimpses who Jesus is. And knows who he is. *Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!* he says. He knows his unworthiness and sin in the presence of the one he now names Lord. *Do not be afraid;* Jesus says, *from now on you will be catching people.* The scholar Brendan Byrne says a better translation is "you will be catching people alive".² And the idea is to help these people grow further into life.

Then Peter and his fellow fishermen leave everything ... and follow him.

Jesus names the truth before him and, in the encounter, Peter glimpses the holiness of Jesus and Peter glimpses his own unworthiness and sinfulness. And it is in this place, this glimpse of the God and this glimpse of human frailty, that Jesus' call to ministry comes. Not in the place of human strength but in the place of the knowledge of human frailty.

This might ring bells for us in the context of the stories of scripture. Do we remember Moses' response when God asked him to help free the people of Israel? He protested his unworthiness at length. And in our reading from chapter 6 of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, in the passage we heard read this morning, the story we might name the call of Isaiah to his work as a prophet, we saw a similar pattern:

² Brendan Byrne *The Hospitality of God: A reading of Luke's Gospel* p57.

Isaiah saw a vision of God in the temple, saw the Lord sitting on a throne, heard a chorus of seraphim sing the words our choir sings as the Sanctus each Sunday morning,

*'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.'*

Isaiah, like Peter, senses the presence of the Holy. And what is his response?

'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!'

As Peter was, in the presence of the holy, Isaiah is painfully aware of his unworthiness and sinfulness. Isaiah is made clean by a seraph touching his lips with a live coal, the seraph saying, 'Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.'

And then Isaiah hears the call of God, the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And Isaiah said, 'Here am I; send me!'

The same pattern of calling from God for Isaiah and for Peter:

A profound sense of the presence of the Holy, and then as Brendan Byrne put it about Peter: "It is just at the moment of painful self-knowledge and truth that the commission comes."³ It is in the place where we know our frailty and sinfulness that God calls us. "Here I am; send me!" Isaiah says in response. *Do not be afraid*; Jesus says to Peter, *from now on you will be catching people alive*. And Peter leaves everything ... and follows him.

"The context of the call," Brendan Byrne writes, "is humanity searching for life. The disciples are to become Jesus' apprentices in the project of the hospitality of God."⁴ Byrne's commentary on Luke's gospel, the gospel that will be our guide this year is entitled "The Hospitality of God." This, he believes is what Luke's Gospel is all about. Jesus eating with people, healing people, teaching people, gathering people, especially those whom society shuns, around a table where they are to know God's great love and welcome. Jesus doing what we so often need before we dare approach and sit with him, forgiving people the sins that bind us, hold us guilty and trapped. And, as Jesus made clear to Peter, afraid.

Last week we celebrated the Presentation of Christ in the Temple and so we beautifully brought to a close this liturgical year, our remembering of the story of Jesus' birth and days of infancy. In one sense it is now, this Sunday, that our year guided by Luke's gospel begins. It is so fitting that we have

³ Ibid., p57.

⁴ Ibid., p56.

heard the story of the call of Peter and the other disciples as they embark on their time following Jesus, having so little idea of what they are doing and where it will all end. All that mattered was that he saw them, that Holy man, Jesus, saw them, knew the truth of them, their frailty and sinfulness, forgave them and called them, saw the worth in them, needed them actually.

...if you know what people are thinking about when they're coming into church on Sunday morning, it's very important to acknowledge that. The Bishop of Washington Marianne Budd's teacher said. She saw a longing for mercy in the hearts of many before her the day she spoke in a sermon that has sent waves of hope across the world.

What do we see? What is the longing in our hearts? For mercy and meaning in a time and place where we might understandably feel so baffled?

Do we know that Jesus, the one whose holiness we might glimpse in our cathedral this morning, that Holy man, sees us, knows us, knows the truth of us, our frailty and sinfulness, forgives us, sees the worth in us, *needs us*, and calls us to follow him for the first time, or again and again, to follow him as he brings love and forgiveness and mercy to our world.