

Epiphany 5C (2/10/2019)

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Psalm 71:1-6

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Luke 4:21-30

An encounter with the Holy has a way of startling us, humbling us, and reorienting us. Jesus discloses God's profound goodness, inspiring us to new reverence and teaching us to love.

At dusk one summer evening, after a long hike into the mountains from Sky Ranch Lutheran Camp in Colorado, I sat with my church youth group and our leaders on a grassy ridge watching the sky change colors. A cool breeze blew across the ridge, inviting silence and stillness as we took in the sights all around. Below us to the east, the lights of Denver were beginning to flicker, and to the west, the Never Summer Range, rugged and snow-capped, towered over everything else. And, there we were in the midst of it all. I'll never forget my sense of awe at the untamed majesty of the world coupled with an awareness of my own small place in it.

Have you ever found yourself in a moment like that? Have you ever been suddenly struck with appreciation and humility at the profound goodness of things? For people of faith, often the only appropriate response to such an experience is to sing with the seraphim: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is filled with God's glory."

Reverence is a spiritual practice, one that is easily abandoned in the course of our everyday lives. As we attend to our rigid schedules and react to repeated stressors, we often fail to notice the miraculous right before our eyes.

That's how Simon's story begins in our Gospel from Luke today. He has already met Jesus, even witnessed Jesus heal his mother-in-law,¹ nevertheless Simon's attention is fixed on his day-to-day responsibilities. When Jesus arrives on the lakeshore early in the morning and steps into his boat, Simon is likely even more preoccupied than usual since he has nothing to show for his night's work. Can we blame him for his skepticism? When Jesus instructs him to let down his nets yet again, he replies, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing." Simon is not yet able to imagine possibilities beyond the scope of his experience. His frame of mind prevents him from perceiving the goodness of God in his midst.

The net-snapping catch of fish, however, is a sign that Simon can't miss. **This mysterious man who comes to him, the one he has called Master without knowing what that really means, discloses the abundance of God's grace in any and everything. And, Simon suddenly realizes that he stands in the presence of the Holy.**

So, he falls to his knees, and he repents. Isn't it interesting how encounters with the Holy have a way of driving us to humility? In a vision of God's glory, the prophet Isaiah declares, "I am a man of unclean lips." Paul acknowledges his place among the first witnesses to the risen Christ, saying, "I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church." And, Simon responds to Jesus' gift of plenty with reluctance: "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" One interpreter characterizes these reactions as archetypal responses to God's goodness:

¹ Luke 4:38-39.

“Each time we experience sheer grace, we are simultaneously joyful and a little afraid, struck by how much more we’ve received than we deserve or even imagined.”²

That’s reverence. And, you don’t have to be party to a supernatural event to practice it. Self-described writer, speaker, and spiritual contrarian Barbara Brown Taylor puts it this way:

[Excerpts from *An Altar in the World*, pp.21, 22-23]

In short, **reverence is the recognition of the sheer givenness of all things, and the acceptance of our proper place in the Giver’s world.** Our place, of course, is not idle, but active. Simon’s reverence doesn’t cause him to keep still, but rather to drop everything – to include the bounty of fish he has just hauled in – and follow Jesus into the reign of God. “Do not be afraid,” the Master tells him, “from now on you will be catching people.”

Dear church, God meets us in glory and grace. And, an **encounter with the Holy has a way of startling us, humbling us, and reorienting us. Jesus is for us the face of God’s goodness, the one in whom we perceive God’s intent to claim us and call us into relationship with each other. Arriving again and again in the circumstances of our everyday lives, he inspires us to new reverence and teaches us to love.**

² David Lose, <http://www.davidlose.net/2019/02/epiphany-5-c-lots-to-love/>.