
I’d like to say that I personally coordinated our annual meeting after the service today with our readings from the lectionary, but unfortunately, I cannot take the credit. The “coincidence” is God’s. Because today we will put our Bishop’s Committee in place. We have people stepping forward to serve. And this ties in to our reading from Isaiah.

And Isaiah is all about humility and willingness. Isaiah has a vision of the Lord Most High. And in his encounter with holiness, he senses with sober recognition his own lowliness saying, “I am lost. A man of unclean lips, because I have seen the holiness of God!” In other words, Isaiah senses his own limitations. He recognizes that he is finite, imperfect, and small. And that in standing before God his own lack is augmented. But God, prepares Isaiah with the burning ember from the altar, and asks, whom shall I send? And strengthened by God, Isaiah answers, “Here am I, Send me.”

And this is what is happening at St. Paul’s. We are all finite and limited people. But because of our encounter with the burning ember from the altar, our Lord Jesus, who purifies us, we are strengthened to use our abilities and answer God by saying, “Here am I send me.” And some here today have offered to be on our Bishop’s committee. And each one of them has stepped forward in humility. They all said, whatever is needed, I will do it. Whatever title I am given or not given, I don’t care. Each one of them has stepped forward like Isaiah with a servant’s heart and willingness.

And the call does not stop with the Bishop’s Committee. Because I see a room full of talent and gifts. I see gifts of commitment and generosity, gifts for music, gifts for hospitality, gifts for organization, gifts for business, gifts for crafting, gifts for teaching and interest in study. And many more gifts and talents - some of which I am not even aware of or you yourselves may not even be aware of; until we try our hand at something, and more gifts are discovered. And I am aware of those of you who are passionate about history who by embracing the past have affected our community for the better by making Tombstone more of a community. And I have a feeling that the word community is going to become more and more of a central theme at St. Paul’s. And everyone here is called to be a part and play a role in this call for community. Our community of St. Paul’s as a people of God, and our going out into and embracing of the community around us. And God will tell us what to do and how to serve if we but ask him.

In fact, the Gospel today is extremely personal to me. Because the Gospel today is about fishermen. Casting their nets in vain. Trying to be effective but finding their nets empty. But when Jesus tells them to cast their net, and they answer in the affirmative, the nets are filled to overflowing. So full they can barely contain the blessing. It swamps them with abundance. And it is this particular Gospel message that is behind my standing up here in front of you. I had found myself empty and unable to catch fish until God touched my heart, just as the ember touched Isaiah’s lips. And some of you have heard me share this, but some of you have not. And I want to share it today as an encouragement. Because we are engaged with a living, loving God that has a purpose for each of us, and sometimes all we
need to do is humble ourselves and ask and we get answered with an abundance that swamps our ship.

Two summers ago, in 2017, I was standing in this very church facing the altar. And I heard a voice to my left, an inaudible voice that was more like a physical push of air say to me, “You should be the priest.” And so, I told Patrick about this, and began to ponder this in my heart. And shortly after this occurrence we went to Convention; and while I was there, I mentioned that I had heard this call to be a priest to Wil and Carolyn. And Wil proceeded to haul me in front of Bishop Smith and announce that I wanted to be a priest. Which mortified me at the time, because I was not expecting to so suddenly be standing before the Bishop. But the Bishop was polite and said, go on line and you can see what the process is and so forth. Then on October 13th I traveled with my daughter up north to do some claims work, and we stayed in a hotel. And my daughter, Raini, is not an early riser and I wanted to have a quiet time. And so, I got up around 4:30, and I went into the bathroom and closed the door so I could turn the light on and not disturb her. And in this particular bathroom, there was no place to sit, besides the floor. And so, I sat on the bathroom floor to have my quiet time. Not thinking of or intending for this to be an exceptionally humble place to have a quiet time, but in retrospect I suppose it is. There aren’t many locations that are humbler than a bathroom floor. But really at issue was I felt empty and in need of direction from our Lord. I had a lot on my heart. I had actually spent a good deal of time crying during convention, because I saw all these people with vibrant ministries, and I felt my own lack. I felt like I should be doing something but did not know what it was. And so, on this particular morning, on the bathroom floor I prayed, “Dear God, if I ask for a fish you will not give me a scorpion. Where do you want me to cast my net?” And a warmth came over me and my breathing became rapid and tears streamed down my face and I had an intense pain in my heart was wrapped around the word, “Harvest.” And it was an unexpected and mystical experience. This knowledge that God was going to place me in a position of harvest. And I can only explain this experience as God’s Spirit interceding for me with groans as described by the Apostle Paul. And I sat there for a while until the experience subsided. And when my daughter woke, we went on a short walk. And just as we returned to the room, I reached my hand to open the door, and my phone rang. And it was a Phoenix number and so I was figuring it to be a work call and so I answered it. But it was Bishop Smith. And Bishop smith asked if I would be interested in this bi-vocational program to become the priest in Tombstone. And I believe you all know what my answer was. But I just had another “coincidence” occur last Tuesday. In the process of doing a research paper for my seminary classes I looked up the Endicott Peabody Feast day. And the Gospel assigned to our Founder’s Day is the one that pertains to Harvest. The very word that appeared in my heart on the bathroom floor. And the account is of Jesus saying to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

And since God has said in no uncertain terms to cast a net in Tombstone and there will be a harvest, I have news for you. I am looking at the harvesters. We have been called together to go forward and gather people into God’s Kingdom. To make a difference. To have a purpose as a parish. And what Jesus said to Simon, he says to you, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” And all Jesus requires is a 5 words response from you saying: “Here am I, Send me.”