

Epiphany 5, Sunday, February 10th, 2019

Readings: Isaiah 6:1-8, Psalm 138, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, Luke 5:1-11

## Walled In - Getting Ourselves Right

### Introduction

These last two weeks, we have focused upon Luke's Gospel's understanding of what Jesus' mission, what Jesus' lifework is all about. We initially concluded that it had to do with the proclamation of the Jubilee: that dramatic Hebrew prescription for freedom and equality between human beings, between all human beings. For the Jesus of Luke's Gospel this is the public vision of the Kingdom of God. Remember those words?

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me  
to proclaim good news to the poor...  
to proclaim liberty to the captives...  
to set free the oppressed  
and to announce the year, the Jubilee of the Lord's favour.*

Last week, we heard of the trouble this manifesto caused: leading to Jesus' attempted assassination. Today, we discover that it is this same troublesome manifesto, that the disciples - in particular Simon, later called Peter - are called to sign up to. Let us begin with the Gospel account, unpicking the threads of the call to Peter. Then, I would like to dig deeper, to develop further, the central insight of the passage.

### The Reading

The story-line is straight-forward. Jesus, pressed by the crowds, moves out into Lake Gennesaret (Sea of Galilee), in order to address them from a platform, of sorts: seated. This idea of being seated is significant: the Hebrew rabbi when drawing upon the full weight of his authority, would always sit. You may recall, Matthew's rendition of the "Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5:1f) There, Jesus sits to teach, he teaches *ek kathedros* - literally "from or out of a seat".

Soon after, teaching, Jesus appeals to a group of sceptical fishermen - the eventual disciples - "to fish deeper", and the extraordinary catch follows soon after. We are told that they respond with awe, overwhelmed. We further learn that Peter recognises his "sinfulness", which refers not so much to an awareness of personal evil, as we would understand it, but rather to his inadequacy, his limitations, the weakness of his human condition. The final words, the punch-line, which is always at the end in Hebrew story-telling, is then dropped: "From now on - instead of fishing - you will be taking people alive" (fishermen of human beings). In the light of Jubilee - which let's remember is the key reference point - Jesus' hope is that Peter and his companions, will become the means to *making people alive*, vehicles toward building a new order of things, marked by freedom and equality.

But this capacity to actually become men *for* freedom, is not immediate: it is gradual, because it requires something fundamental: that Peter and his friends become *free from their own personal, psychological, spiritual disorder, free from their own chaotic attachments, which if left unexamined and untreated will only undermine the enterprise.*

Let's trace Peter's journey toward freedom, toward his personal, existential freedom, as the first step in becoming a disciple. There are three important stages in Peter's journey; our current passage is one of them.

First, Jesus initially meets Peter, back in chapter 4 (4:38), where after leaving the synagogue, he enters Peter's home. For the Hebrew world, the home, psychologically speaking, is a symbol of the ego or the self. The home represents class, wealth, taste, status, even, in many cases, a person's

psychology, made visible to others. To say "he entered Peter's (Simon's) house" is to say, at a psychological level, that Jesus entered into Peter's world.

Second, we come to our current reading. Jesus gets into Peter's boat, into his business-life. This time, he does not enter into Simon's personal space, but rather into his "economic space." He enters his occupation, his means of livelihood, his way of participation in the economic system.

Third, we then hear some key words: Jesus tells Simon to "launch out into the deep". Thus far, Jesus has entered into Simon's personal and public economic life. But here, there is something different. It is, in effect, a call to lose himself in every way – to shed his attachments, especially those that define his success, his status, his social identity in the community. This is confronting and understandably, Peter is fearful, but Jesus, encourages him. To paraphrase, "Don't be fearful, because your old self, your old attachments which defined you, have gone. You are to live a new value system, the Jubilee, you will be taking, catching people alive, you will be promoting life, not death"

So, this whole process of Peter's re-birth – we may call it conversion – is about following Jesus, yes; *but* following Jesus in a particular way: promoting the manifesto, living out the platform, putting into effect the Jubilee. To follow Jesus, means to follow what Jesus represents – not Jesus in the abstract. And to follow what Jesus represents – Jubilee – requires Peter to deal with those demons, those obstacles, those attachments, that disorder within himself, that is incompatible with the call. What do I mean? Issues such as his upper middle-class status and comforts which skewed the way he saw things; his undeniable Jewish religious racism, as Paul confirms in his conflict with Peter (2:11-13f), recorded in Galatians. We could go on.

### **Some Applications**

What is clear then, from this passage is this: that Peter's internal state must be consistent with, congruent with, the Jubilee values he announces. This insight in Luke is fundamental.

But this insight is stunningly relevant for today as well. Our current malaise in societies – western and eastern – has to do in considerable part with the disorder of institutions and the people within them, which undermines the "rule of law". Invariably public statements about corporate ethics, are not worth the paper they are written on. Banks, insurance companies, government departments, schools, churches, even human rights organizations: all are beset by disturbing levels of contradiction and hypocrisy. Secularism – the dominant framework within which we live and operate – *does not have the depth*, the insight to help us address the problem. While we may recognize it, we do not know what to do about it. We are paralysed, apart from making new rules and regulations. What really stands at the heart of the problem, is the loss of personal and collective virtue, and behind that the absolute priority of conversion: conversion to Jubilee, for which Christ stands, understood in the deep, deep sense of ordering our attachments, getting ourselves psychologically and spiritually right, so we live coherently, consistently and persuasively.

The American theological blogger, John Petty writes this about our Gospel reading concerning the fundamental importance of the conversion of Peter and by extension, us.

*"The process of Peter's conversion is not complete. Then again, no one's conversion is ever complete. We must be constantly born anew--shaken out from our old disordered attachments each and every day"*