

Lay Preachers' Bulletin – February 2022

February's lectionary notes have been provided by The Rev. Chris Roth, Incumbent of St. Leonard's on the Hill, Red Deer.

February 6 – Epiphany 5

(Propers BAS page 353)

Luke 5:1-11 (The Lake of Gennesaret is the Lake of Galilee).

- Jesus used the geography of the shoreline to create a natural amphitheatre to teach the gathered crowd.

- Peter calls Jesus “Master” and “Lord”. To call him “Lord” and not obey him is a contradiction.
To call him “Lord” is to declare that he has the right to direct our lives. Peter obeyed the direction to let down the nets during the day, even though he was the expert fisherman and he had caught nothing while fishing at night, which is the optimal time to catch fish. What do we do with the directions of Jesus when we don't understand why he would ask us to do these things?

- Peter and the others were experts in fishing. They fished at the right time (at night) and put in a lot of effort (they fished *all* night). However, it did not produce the result they desired. “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain” (Psalm 127). Symbolically, if we aren't working in God's way, our efforts could be done in vain, regardless of our expertise and effort. The opposite is also

true- God can do an amazing amount with even minimal effort when mixed with faithful obedience.

- In the face of the miracle of the catch of fish, Peter speaks as others who are confronted by Divinity speak - “when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!’”. Compare this with - “‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty’” (Is 6:5). Liturgically, when we approach God we prepare ourselves through confession and absolution. Humility is a necessary step as we approach the Divine. Therefore, humility is also a prerequisite as we enter into mission. Peter’s humility before Jesus was necessary for him to become a fisher of people.
- This miraculous catch of fish seems to be reflected in John 21:1-11, but this time it is after the resurrection.

February 13 – Epiphany 6
(Propers BAS page 354)
Luke 6:17-26

- This reflects a similar teaching from Matthew 5:1-12. It’s not inconceivable that Jesus would taught similar teachings in multiple different settings.
- This is a teaching he gave to his disciples- those who had accepted him as their teacher.

- Jesus describes a number of situations people might find themselves in and then calls them “blessed” or “fortunate”. But they seem to be backwards. Our society, as well as Jesus’ society, would say “Blessed are the rich”, but Jesus says “blessed are you who are poor”. Society would say “blessed are the full and satisfied”, but Jesus says, “Blessed are you who are hungry”. Society would say, “Blessed are those who laugh”, but Jesus says, “blessed are you who weep”. Society would say, “Blessed are you when people love you”, but Jesus says, “blessed are you when people hate you, exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of [Jesus]”. It all seems very backwards.
- There isn’t anything inherently good about being poor, hungry, sad, or hated. They are not situations we are to try to imitate. Christian commentators sometimes try to find ways for us to be imitators of these traits. So, they might suggest we give away all our money to be poor. They might suggest the practice of fasting to be hungry. They suggest weeping over our sins in repentance. And they suggest participating in evangelism and standing up for Christian values in the political arena to the point of being hated, excluded, reviled, and defamed.
- Just as we might be tempted to assume that those who are facing tragedy have been forgotten (or rejected) by God, so we might be tempted to make assumptions about those who are experiencing fortunate circumstances are somehow favoured by God. We shouldn’t automatically assume that

people are in God's favour merely because people are in these situations.

In our society and in ancient societies, wealth was often considered a sign that a person was specially favoured by God. Jesus is debunking this common assumption. Don't assume that you can tell if someone is blessed by God or not on the basis of how much money they have in the bank.

- The philosopher and spiritual teacher Dallas Willard suggests that Jesus is saying that whatever your situation, you can be a part of the Kingdom he is talking about. There can be an assumption in our society about who is blessed, usually they are the rich, the beautiful, and those who haven't had to deal with any major tragedy. Jesus is saying that you don't have to get your financial situation sorted out before you can feel the blessing of God and be welcomed as a citizen of His Kingdom. Whatever situation you are in is a fine entry point into the kingdom. You can be hungry and a member of the kingdom. You can be dealing with tragedy and be in the kingdom of God. Tragedy isn't an indication that God has abandoned you, which is a temptation for some of us. Society might reject you, and even hate you, because you are a disciple of Jesus, but that doesn't mean you have failed, or that God isn't with you, or that you aren't a citizen of the kingdom of God. God will happily receive you wherever you are and He will bring you into the Kingdom where he will exchange poverty for a kingdom, hunger for full bellies, weeping for laughter, and rejection for a great reward.

Wherever we are, and whatever we are going through, we are welcomed to take our first steps into the kingdom. Living in the

kingdom isn't a promise to live a stress-free life. Living in the kingdom for Jesus meant a cross. Living in the midst of suffering and struggle doesn't mean you are excluded from the kingdom. If you struggle because you're poor, or hungry, or because you are sad, or hated, excluded, reviled, and defamed, you can still be a citizen of the kingdom. Even in the midst of these struggles you are welcome to live the life of the kingdom. Even on the cross Jesus was living the life of the kingdom.

February 20 – Epiphany 7
(Propers BAS page 356)
Luke 6:27-38

- I suspect many of us hear those words, and recognize them as strangely beautiful, but then quietly reject them as not livable. It is anti-intuitive to love your enemy. ... Is it even possible? What do we mean by “love” in that context? We hear Jesus say to turn the other cheek when struck and we suspect that our fist would be halfway to the other person's nose before we have had a chance to start thinking about it. ... We hear Jesus saying give to everyone who asks, and we suspect we could go broke quite easily following that command. ... So, what many Christians do is politely and quietly put these teachings away as sweet words, but don't seriously consider them realistic and livable.
- Now “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” we get. That is the rule we find in Exodus 21:24. There we read “if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for

tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe” (Exodus 21:23-24). We get that. Someone harms you so that you lose an eye, well you can’t kill them, but you can take their eye. ... The Old Testament is often about limiting the damage of sin. “Eye for eye and tooth for tooth” was meant to put limits on retaliation. It limits the effects of sin. We get that. That is sort of the system we use. You do damage to me or my property and the law says you need to compensate for that damage, and it also says I can’t seek revenge in a way that exceeds the crime done to me.

- However, if you take away the context and you just think about the act of taking a person’s eye, or tooth, we see that it is an act of destruction. One anonymous ancient commentator said, “If therefore we begin ... to return evil for evil to everyone, we are all made evil” (Anonymous, *Incomplete Work on Matthew, Homily 13*).

... Jesus wants us to live in the kingdom right now. So, in everything we do we need to ask ourselves, is this the kind of act that we would find in God’s kingdom? Is a person who lives in the kingdom of God the kind of person that can gouge out a person’s eye? ... Destructive actions like taking a person’s eye out do not have a place in that kingdom. Those acts of destruction belong outside the kingdom, so participating in them does something to us and our ability to live in the kingdom Jesus speaks about. We are suddenly acting like people of the fallen world, rather than people of the kingdom.

- Jesus knew that when we use fire to fight fire we are likely to have a giant fire that will probably burn us and others. We

need a different way of responding to evil as citizens of the kingdom of God. We need water, not more fire. ... Put yourself in the attacker's position, if you hit someone and then they hit you back, you suddenly feel very justified in hitting them again. But if you hit someone and they don't hit you back it is usually harder to feel justified in hitting them again.

- Some, like Bishop N.T. Wright, believe that there is strategy behind Jesus' words. If someone were to strike you on your right cheek it probably meant they struck you with the back of their hand. This was not only a violent act, but it was insulting as well. It was an action that declared you were an inferior. What Jesus says isn't "run away", nor is it "hit back". Jesus says to face them and turn to them the other cheek. To hit you on the other cheek with their right hand means suddenly the person has to treat you as an equal, rather than as an inferior.
- Gandhi was incredibly inspired by these words of Jesus. He believed that not hitting back and looking the attacker in the eye called out the deeper humanity of the attacker. The other famous example is The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., who was a Christian minister, but who also wrote that Gandhi's teachings were "the guiding light of our technique of nonviolent social change".
- Bishop N.T. Wright has said, "The kingdom that Jesus preached and lived was all about a glorious, uproarious, absurd generosity. Think of the best thing you can do for the worst person, and go ahead and do it. Think of what you'd really like someone to do for you, and do it for them. Think of

the people to whom you are tempted to be nasty, and lavish generosity on them instead. These instructions have a fresh, springlike quality. They are all about new life bursting out energetically, like flowers growing through concrete and startling everyone with their colour and vigour.” These are examples of Kingdom living. These are ways of imitating the Heavenly Father of Jesus Christ, who showers blessings and mercy on everyone- the deserving and the undeserving.

- I don't think Jesus meant these as laws we are to blindly follow, rather, they are wisdom. But, the Early Church also understood the complexity of these teachings. ... The early church father Theodore of Heraclea (355ad) says, “he does not command to give to everyone who asks without exception, even if one has nothing to give, for that is impossible. Nor does he instruct us, if we have plenty, to give to someone who asks with a bad motive. For the donation then goes for evil things. ... For why is it said [in Acts 4:35] concerning the apostles that ‘distribution was made to each as any had need’? This tells us that they gave not so much to those who simply asked but that they provided for others on the basis of need.” So, the early church understood that these were complicated issues.
- Our reasons for not wanting to follow these teachings seem to have to do with fear. We fear that if we don't hit back, then our enemy wins. We fear that if we give to everyone who asks that we won't have enough for ourselves. ... To follow through on these teachings we have to really believe that our hope is in another kingdom. Our hope is not found in our earthly safety

because we will all die. Our hope is not found in our possessions, because they can be easily stolen from us. Justice will only ultimately be found in the Kingdom. To live in the way of Jesus requires us to put all our hope in God.

- The kingdom way that Jesus describes is also about our own spiritual health. Loving our enemy benefits our enemy, but it also benefits us. If we sit in our hatred of our enemy, we are hurting ourselves. The same anonymous church commentator said, "I think that Christ ordered these things not so much for our enemies as for us: not because enemies are fit to be loved by others but because we are not fit to hate anyone. For hatred is the prodigy of dark places. Wherever it resides, it sullies the beauty of sound sense. Therefore not only does Christ order us to love our enemies for the sake of cherishing them but also for the sake of driving away from ourselves what is bad for us. ... If you merely hate [your enemy], you have hurt yourself more in the spirit than you have hurt him in the flesh. Perhaps you don't harm him at all by hating him. But you surely tear yourself apart. If then you are benevolent to an enemy, you have rather spared yourself than him". Similarly, one of my favourite teachers, Dallas Willard, once commented that if we think loving our enemies seems impossible we should look at the lives of those who hate their enemy. Then we can ask ourselves which way of living seems more desirable- hating our enemies or loving them?

February 27 – Transfiguration

(Propers BAS page 418)

Luke 9:28-36

- Today we have reached the end of the season of Epiphany. “Epiphany” comes from a Greek word meaning something like “manifestation”. Many medieval calendars used the Greek name “Theophany” for this season, which means ‘manifestation of God’. This season is about how God was made manifest in the person of Jesus. Throughout this season we have read about different ways that Christ has been made known to the world. The season is bookended by two major events. The first is the visit of the Magi to Jesus and his parents. And the event that ends the season is the Transfiguration.
- Right before our Gospel reading today Jesus asks his disciples the question, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” And they answer, “John the Baptist, but some say Elijah; and others say that one of the old prophets has risen again” (Luke 9:18-20). If you asked people on the street who Jesus is you would get a variety of answers. Some would say he is a mythical figure who never existed. Some would say he was a magician. Some would say he was a teacher about morality. Some even think he was an alien in disguise. Others think he is a kind of enlightened being like the Buddha. Others think he was an idealistic young man who was trying to change his

society, but who was crushed by the political powers of the day.

- After the disciples answer, Jesus turns and asks them a more important question. His second question is not about what people say, but what they say as his disciples. He asks, “Who do you say that I am?” (Lk 9:20). This is the more important question- For the disciples, as well as for us. We can spend a lot of time theorizing about who Jesus might be without actually committing ourselves to an answer. There is a big difference between thinking a lot about Jesus in a theoretical and academic way ... and committing ourselves to him as our Lord. ... Peter, representing the disciples’ answers, “The Christ of God” (Lk 9: 20).

What we say about Jesus might affect our life. If we say, “Jesus was a kind and idealistic young man who lived a long time ago” our lives won’t be that altered. We can feel free to ignore his directions as mere suggestions. ... But, if we declare Jesus to be the “image of God on earth and our Lord” ... well, that will change everything because what he says is actually the final word of authority on all subjects he addresses. For us to call him Lord and ignore what he says about living life is to make ourselves vulnerable to the accusation of hypocrisy.

- Immediately after Peter’s declaration Jesus begins talking about how he has to suffer, be rejected, and then killed. He then extends this to anyone who desires to follow him- they must deny themselves and pick up their cross. ... In Matthew’s Gospel this is where Peter rebukes Jesus telling him that he

doesn't have to die. It's not very hard to see why. Why would you want your leader to suffer and die, and why would you want to follow him into that suffering?

This issue of the suffering of Christ, and his disciples' suffering (by extension), is central to these issues of Identity- Who is Jesus? Yes, he is the Christ of God ... and he will have to suffer and be rejected because of it. ... And this is not easy to accept.

- The image of the messiah at the time was a kind of warrior king, like King David, who would remove the oppression of Rome and restore the dignity of the nation of Israel. Suffering and dying wasn't a part of that image, so that's a lot to swallow. They might very well be asking themselves if this is really the Messiah they believed the Scriptures spoke about.
- They see Jesus transfigured. His face is changed, and his robe becomes white and glistening. He looks like a heavenly being, which is of course who he is. He came from heaven, he existed before his own birth. ... The Eastern Orthodox Church sees the transfiguration as a huge deal. They see this as Jesus revealing his divinity- Jesus is God. Divine light shines from him. Something hidden is revealed and the disciples see Jesus as he truly is.
- Two others appear with Jesus- They see Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. Their appearance shows that what Jesus is doing is in line with what God has always been doing. What Jesus is doing is supported by the representatives of both the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah). Jesus is not starting a

new religion, though he is leading God's followers to a new covenant- a new stage in their life with God. And what are they talking with him about? His "exodus" that he would accomplish in Jerusalem.

- Peter, not knowing what to do, but feeling he should do something speaks up. "Should I set up three tents- one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah?" Peter still isn't getting it. Peter might be thinking that his image of the messiah as the warrior-ruler is coming true. Tonight they set up camp and tomorrow they head to Jerusalem with Moses and Elijah to set up the kingdom on earth. Maybe they can even leave out that whole unpleasant suffering bit.
- While Peter is still speaking a cloud overshadowed them, like the Glory of God that rested on Mt. Sinai and filled the temple. They hear a voice, "This is my beloved son. Hear him!" They hear the voice of God the Father and he declares that He has a special and intimate relationship with Jesus. He is His beloved Son. These words echo the words we hear at Jesus' baptism. The disciples are reassured that Jesus is indeed in line with God's will.
- There are parts of who Jesus is that we sometimes don't want to see. There are parts about Jesus we want to emphasize and follow, but there are also parts we are just unwilling to incorporate into our life. At that point we have to ask ourselves what we mean when we call Jesus our "Lord". Is it just a word? Does he actually know the best way to be human? Or do we know better than him?

- Perhaps as we prepare to enter into Lent we could hear the Father's words with a new kind of gravity, "Listen to Him!" Perhaps we can allow those words to change how we hear every Gospel reading as we hear with hearts that desire to live out his teachings.