

When I was young, I did not have a very good sense of self. That poor sense of self led me to make some poor choices in life and it also kept me from making some **wise** decisions. You see, I often thought I was not good enough to achieve a specific goal. From the time I was quite young, I also had a desire to go into ministry and sensed God's call in my life. However, I kept telling myself, "I am not good enough to do this. I am not worthy of doing this." I felt pursuing such a goal was an exercise in futility. I could easily think of every possible reason to **not** respond to God's call. As time went on, God just kept working on me and drawing me ever more deeply into the waters of God's grace. God kept gently and graciously challenging me until I said, "Yes." And, ultimately, my faith journey and the ministry I live into has been all about the way God graciously and lovingly works through the broken, imperfect person that I am. It really is **all** about a gracious, loving God who holds me in grace, the loving God who holds all of us in grace, and what that God of grace does with a YES.

There is a corresponding, underlying message heard in each of our scripture readings today. All the people in today's readings experienced a certain sense of unworthiness. In our first reading, King Uzziah has just died, and Isaiah has a grand, glorious, bigger than life vision of God. As he finds

himself in the presence of the greatness of God, Isaiah feels unworthy. He says, "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!" An angel then touches Isaiah's lips with a piece of coal. When that happens, the grace of God's holiness and the healing power of God's presence removes Isaiah's guilt. Having been healed, Isaiah hears God need's some help. God, the glorious, splendiferous, robe-clad God **needs** something! Isaiah raises his hand and humbly utters the words, "Here am I, send me." Isaiah responds with a YES, saying **he** will follow God's call.

In our reading from 1 Corinthians, after reminding his listeners not to forget the essence of the good news of the gospel, Paul proceeds to use himself as an illustration of God's gracious presence in life. He says, "I am the **least** of the apostles, I am **unfit** to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." Having stated his unworthiness, he then speaks of Jesus appearing to him after the resurrection, and Paul testifies to the grace and power of the resurrected Christ in his own life. Having been embraced by God's grace, Paul said YES to God, and God worked through him to help grow the early church.

Then, as we enter today's gospel reading, it is an early morning beside the lake of Gennesaret. As we encounter Simon and his

companions, we discover they have been out fishing all night long and their efforts have been an exercise in futility. They are experiencing real fatigue after working all night and having caught nothing. They have no fish to eat, and they have no fish to sell. Quite honestly, in their fatigue, they also may be doubting their skills and capability as fishermen. Isn't that how we tend to feel when the slow-rising tide of futility washes in on us? We don't just begin to doubt what we can do. We begin to doubt who we are. Anyway, Jesus enters the scene and, when Jesus steps into the scene or enters any situation, everything changes! To better address the pressing throng of people gathered around him, Jesus improvises and commandeers Simon's boat as he speaks to the people. After he finished speaking, Jesus says to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Well, Simon, feeling this effort would again be futile, answers, 'Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet, if you say so, I will let down the nets.'" Then, to their amazement after doing what Jesus asked, they caught so many fish their nets were beginning to break. So, they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help. And they came and filled both boats to overflowing. In fact, the writer of Luke's gospel tells us the boats were so full they began to sink.

As I studied this story, one thing Jesus says just really seems to jump off the page. He says, “Put out into the **deep** water.” I ask you to sit with that phrase for a minute and let that phrase sink **deep** into your heart. “Put out into the **deep** water.” When we are feeling swamped by a sense of futility, swamped by the issues of this pandemic, swamped by the challenges life presents, just maybe we need to go deeper in the waters of faith. Jesus invites us to look out upon our life from a different viewpoint. Jesus says to Simon Peter, “Take some risks.” Simon’s initial reply is that of a very rational mind as he states why he does not think it makes sense to go out in the deep. However, he trusts Jesus and he does it anyway! Just maybe, Jesus is trying to get Simon and his friends to move from a worldview of reason to a worldview of spiritual risk. Most of us have a worldview of scarcity and, consequently, we don’t go outside of our comfort zones. We **don’t** tend to be spiritual entrepreneurs; we stick with business as usual. Yet, Jesus invites us to launch out to **deeper waters**, where much is often **invisible**, where there is a real element of **uncertainty**. The truth is, we prefer shallow waters where there is nothing new, where there is certainty and quite frankly, safety. Well, Simon took the risk, and they found an abundance of fish, so much so that they filled two boats. And then Simon Peter responds as most people do when they are in the

presence of **greatness** – he encounters a sense of fear and good self-questioning. And Simon Peter says, “Depart from me, I am a sinful man.”

It is interesting, when I have found myself in deep waters, in situations where I have truly felt I was in over my head, I have had to look at myself. When I have been in deep waters, I have had to do some good self-questioning. Truthfully, those deep waters often mean facing the cross. But, at the same time, I have discovered that the abundant, gracious presence of God has held me and buoyed me in that place, carried me through, and taken me to new places. You see, God who is the author of abundance and grace **holds** us, **lifts us up**, and **carries** us through.

In the presence of such abundance, Simon feels unworthy and afraid. Jesus then says to Simon, “Do not be afraid!” Now, it is important to remember this phrase – **do not be afraid** – is the single most common phrase in the entire Bible. Think about that. Yet, most of us are very fear-based people. But, God says, **don’t be afraid**. Jesus tells Simon Peter “Don’t be afraid of who you are, don’t be afraid to face yourself, don’t be afraid of what you have just done. Don’t be afraid of taking a risk. Don’t be afraid of what lies before you. Don’t be afraid of trusting God’s presence to you. The God of abundant grace holds you in love. From now on you will know how to catch people and share my love. And, you will do this, not by

coercing or luring, or even being nice, but by being **real**, by taking a **risk** and being **vulnerable**. Then, you will truly connect with people, and you will share the love I have for you and all others.”

Jesus called Simon to follow him. Simon Peter responded with a YES, and his life was forever changed. Luke tells us, “They left everything and followed him!” Jesus called Simon to a life of deep faith, to something bigger than anything he’d ever imagined. And Jesus gave Simon Peter the job of **catching people up in the unfathomable, life-changing grace of God**.

The voice of God called Isaiah, St. Paul, and Simon Peter, unlikely characters that they were. That is how God works, I very well know, always choosing and calling the unlikeliest of characters through whom to work, putting aside all their doubts and fears and excuses and professed shortcomings to do marvelous things through them. That voice of abundance and grace also calls each one of **us**. That voice calls us to move out into the deep **grace-filled** waters of a life of faith. Moving out into the deep grace-filled waters will not always be easy. It will likely unsettle us and sometimes it will look like a cross. But, when we follow that call and say YES, we will experience a life of deep meaning, life that really, truly matters, and life will never again be the same.