

The Rev. Michael C. Fedewa

February 7, 2010

Epiphany 5C

Isaiah 6:1-8

I Corinthians 15:1-11

Luke 5:1-11

Every day has its rituals. Mondays are different than Fridays which are different than Saturdays, which are different from Sundays. My Sunday morning rituals are the ones I follow, shall we say, the most religiously. I never sleep well on Saturday nights, so Linda usually shoves me out of bed on Sunday morning between 4 and 5 am. The first thing I do is when I get turn on the coffee. After I shower and dress, I to prepare my English muffin with peanut butter and raspberry jam, pour my coffee, and turn on my computer. I check email, Face book, ESPN and CNN. The last website to be checked is the New York Times. They say that the three biggest lies are, I am from the IRS and I am here to help you; Its even easier than it looks, and I read the entire Sunday NY Times. So, I won't try to tell you that I read the entire NYTimes. No, the only page I read before church Sunday is the editorial page. There are 4 columnists I read each Sunday. They address issues of issues related to world events, politics and culture. Always, the last one I read is Nicholas Kristof. Mr. Kristof has been a columnist for the Times since 2001 and is a winner of two Pulitzer prizes. He co-wrote with his wife, Sheryl WeDunn, the 2009 award winning book *Half the Sky* which is a book about the achievements of women who have overcome oppression and turned it into opportunity. Every year, Mr. Kristof selects one college student to travel with him to places in the world mired in desperate poverty. Mr. Kristof's columns are not sarcastic, hateful, partisan, or cynical. He is not obsessed with the latest Washington scandal. He writes from all over the world, speaking about every day people and the difference they make. He has written with passion about the world wide sex trade that enslaves women and children, prison reform, religious persecution, health care, water purification, the Sudan, Pakistan, Haiti, Kenya. This morning his article is about the holocaust that is gripping the Congo. His writings almost always end in a challenge and hope. When I finish his column I often say to myself, I wish I could preach like he writes. Often it is the people I meet through his works that I hold in my heart when I pray, "Help me to preach in a way that honors and respects those who suffer and die today for your Gospel."

In the last few weeks Kristof has written 3 columns that deeply moved me. He wrote on January 20 about the desperate situation in Haiti. He stressed the beauty, resilience and strength of the Haitian people. He called on people and nations to assist in providing short term assistance and relief and long term development in that country. On January 17 he wrote a column entitled *Food Sex and Giving* which introduced scientific studies which show that it is part of the make up of human beings to give, to be generous, to be part of a cause bigger than themselves. It feels good to give, and to be generous. In fact, helping others, he wrote, may be as primal a pleasure as food and sex.

On January 24, Kristof wrote a column that asked "What can you live without?" In that column, he introduced his readers to Kevin and Joan Salwen . Kevin tells the story of a conversation he had with his 14 year old daughter Hannah. He was driving his daughter back from a sleepover in 2006. While waiting at a traffic light, they saw a black Mercedes coupe on one side and a homeless man begging for food on the other. "Dad, if that man had a less nice car, that man there could have a meal," Hannah observed. The light changed and they drove on, but Hannah continued to talk about the car and the man. She pestered her parents about inequity, insisting that she wanted to do something. "What do you want to do?" her mom responded. "Sell our house?" Ooops.

Eventually that is exactly what they did. The family sold their home, downsized, and donated their earnings to a foundation supporting development in Ghana. In so doing they discovered that the smaller home brought them closer together as a family.

These columns have been very much on my mind since I read them, and especially as I read today's Gospel. The Gospel is one that we are perhaps very familiar with. The crowd presses on Jesus to hear the word of God. Jesus preaches from the boat of Simon Peter. After preaching Jesus instructs Simon to put down his nets. Simon

protests, yet does what he is asked. The nets are filled, the boats begin to sink. Simon confesses his sinfulness. Jesus calls. Simon and the others leave everything to follow Jesus.

After a night of empty nets, Jesus fills the nets with fish. Something about that catch shakes Simon's world. Friends, I want to tell you that if I come back from a day of fishing with four or five fish, I am ecstatic, I am literally beside myself with glee. With Simon, there is no excitement, no elation. Instead, just the opposite, Simon is humbled, he bows in confession and leaves his nets.

It was the biggest catch of his life. And Simon walks away. It was a catch that he only could of dreamed of, and he walks away. I wonder. Could it be that the filled nets spoke to Simon about how empty his life was? All his life, this is what he dreamed of. This catch made him successful, it added to his wealth. In the face of this success, perhaps Simon knew that his life had been as empty as the nets were all night long. Perhaps, just perhaps, this is the sin that Simon is confessing. Jesus, I have wasted my life in pursuit of selfish goals.

Jesus lifts Simon and calls him. Come follow me and I will make you fish for people. Come follow me and I will make you bring people into the kingdom of God. Come follow me and I will fill, not only your nets, but your life.

Have you ever reached some milestone, achieved a well deserved award, accomplished some long sought after goal only to discover that your joy is short lived, only to discover that there is still emptiness in your stomach. You have landed the job, written the essay, bought the house, mounted the trophy, won the race and still you are not satisfied. For all the late night talk show jokes about Tiger Woods, isn't he just an extreme example of someone who had it all, and more, and was still empty, still unsatisfied. He was full, and yet still starving.

The crowds pressed in on Jesus because they were starving. They were starving for the word of God. Starving for that which could satisfy. Simon had a dream catch, his nets were filled to the breaking point.....and he walked away from it because Jesus offered him more.

Jesus makes the same offer to you and me. Peter walked away from his bursting nets. The Salwen family walked away from their home. In walking away from what they had, they were walking toward a fuller and richer life. Jesus invites us to a fuller and richer life as well. It is not as if we need to walk away from everything we have forever. What we can walk away from is the big lie that it is our nets, our trophies, our successes that make us human or give our life meaning. We can walk away from the biggest lie that pursuing my individual happiness will ever bring me happiness. Jesus, showed us, in his life, and in his ministry that true happiness, true life is found in serving God by serving our neighbors, by serving those in need. Jesus is inviting us to be part of something bigger than ourselves, be part of something that will satisfy us longer than a Super bowl trophy or even a tremendous catch of fish.

Jesus invites us to share his purpose, to share in the building of God's kingdom. Jesus invites us to follow him and be eternally satisfied.
