

Sermons at  
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)  
Reggie Denton, Pastor

February 6, 2022 (5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany, Year C)

Luke 5:1-11

Isaiah 6:1-8

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

There's a song from a musical that goes, "Anything you can do I can do better! I can do anything better than you!" In today's readings, people ARE OUTDOING each other, but they're outdoing each other in HUMILITY.

The prophet Isaiah moans, "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!" Simon Peter cries out, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" Even St. Paul, the KIND of man who says, without blinking, "I worked HARDER than ANY of them," describes himself HERE as "the LEAST of the apostles, UNFIT to be CALLED an apostle."

Now these AREN'T cases of FALSE humility, you know, PRIDE at BEING HUMBLE ("look at me, look how HUMBLE I am"); these men are being HONEST. They honestly DON'T think they are GOOD enough to DESERVE this calling. They aren't HOLY men — they just PLAIN, ORDINARY people. St. Paul was actively PERSECUTING Christians when God called HIM. Peter was a simple FISHERMAN washing his nets. They didn't think they were WORTHY of their calling.

We can RELATE to that. MOST of us DON'T feel WORTHY, compared to OTHERS, or even worthy to GOD.

Now, here in the upper Midwest we've been TAUGHT humility, strictly and strongly. No one wants to be first in line, or sit at the front of the class, or, obviously (ahem), sit in the front pew. But that's okay. There's nothing WRONG with humility.

But for most of us, it goes DEEPER than that. We honestly don't FEEL worthy. We don't want to be called upon, or, for THAT matter, even NOTICED, because we know all too well that we have flaws and faults. Most of the time we put up a good FRONT for OTHERS, so they can't SEE our faults. We're defensive. We want to PROTECT ourselves.

There used to be a practice in churches of calling on visitors and asking them to stand up and tell their names, and maybe even say something ABOUT themselves. Would YOU want to do that? NO! OF COURSE NOT! Most people want to be anonymous and left alone. People were LITERALLY RUNNING from those churches. I've heard stories.

Have you ever been asked by a superior, "Hey, we need to talk. Can you stop by my office later?" Is our FIRST thought: "He must want to give me a compliment"? NO! We automatically think the worst: "Am I in trouble?" or "What did I do wrong?" We're defensive.

We even do it with people we LIKE. Early on in friendships and relationships, we don't want anyone to SEE our flaws, so we try to HIDE them. We want people to see us with rose-colored glasses, so they don't know what we're REALLY like.

Take for example, online dating profiles. Are those EVER honest?

What about our posts on Facebook and other social media. They portray a perfect life and a perfect family. Compared to those, how can our FLAWED lives measure up. It's one of the reasons depression among our young people is at the HIGHEST RATE it has EVER been.

Obviously, that's NOT what we really WANT or NEED. And we KNOW it. We can see the TRUTH when we look at our relationships with the people we're CLOSEST to: our family, our closest friends, our spouses. THOSE are the people who DON'T see us with the rose-colored glasses. Those are the people we've had ARGUMENTS and FIGHTS with. Those are the people who KNOW our faults—and LOVE us ANYWAY.

THAT'S what we REALLY WANT, what we really NEED. To be KNOWN, COMPLETELY, with ALL our flaws and weaknesses, and LOVED, not just in SPITE of them, but BECAUSE of them. That's what REAL love IS.

And that's what we mean when we say, "GOD IS LOVE." God created us. God KNIT us together in our mother's womb. God KNOWS all our thoughts and all our fears before WE do. God numbers the hairs on our heads. And LOVES us, not in SPITE of our flaws, but BECAUSE of them, loves us COMPLETELY and UNCONDITIONALLY.

And as IMPERFECT as we are, God CALLS us to DO HIS WORK. We're not WORTHY of that work, and we KNOW that, but God CALLS us anyway. We don't NEED to be WORTHY, because the call ITSELF is what MAKES us worthy.

Therefore, Isaiah could say, "The seraph touched my lips with the live coal and now my sin is blotted out." Peter would have to admit, "Three times I denied him, but the angel at his empty grave said to the women, 'Go tell his disciples and PETER...!' And Paul could say, "By the grace of GOD I am what I am."

Let me give you an example of what I'm talking about. Alexander Papaderos was a doctor of philosophy, who worked for many years after WWII, trying to bring peace between the bitterly divided countries of Europe. His motivation for doing so stems from an odd event that took place in his childhood.

"When I was a small child," he said, "during the war, we were poor and lived in a remote village. One day, on the road, I found the broken pieces of a mirror. A German motorcycle had been wrecked in that place.... I KEPT one, the largest piece.... By scratching it on a stone, I made it round. I began to play with it as a toy and became FASCINATED by the fact that I could REFLECT light into DARK places where the sun would NEVER shine – in deep holes and crevices and dark closets. It became a GAME for me to get light into the most INACCESSIBLE places I could find. I KEPT the little mirror, and as I went about my growing up, I would take it out in idle moments and continue the CHALLENGE of the game.

As I became [mature], I grew to understand that this was a METAPHOR for what I might do with my LIFE. I came to understand that I am NOT the light or the SOURCE of light. The light [or the truth] is THERE, and it will shine in MANY dark places ONLY if I REFLECT it."

He concluded: "I am a FRAGMENT of a mirror whose whole design and shape I do not know. Nevertheless, with what I HAVE, I can REFLECT light into the DARK places of the world...and CHANGE some things in people. Perhaps OTHERS may SEE and do likewise."

We are ALL BROKEN, FLAWED FRAGMENTS of that mirror, but that's OKAY, because we aren't the SOURCE of the light anyway; we only REFLECT the light.

Okay, we don't feel WORTHY of God calling us, but neither did ANY of God's servants:

Moses said he was "slow of speech";  
Jeremiah said he was "too young";  
Amos said, "I am no prophet";  
Mary said, "How can this be?";  
Peter said he was "too sinful";  
the centurion said he was "not worthy";  
and Paul said, "I know that nothing good lives in me."

NONE of them thought they were GOOD enough, and LOOK how God USED them.

Today it's OUR turn. God doesn't call the EQUIPPED; God EQUIPS the CALLED. God calls, and doesn't ask if we are SUITABLE...only if we are AVAILABLE. That's the ONLY question – not if you're GOOD enough – God will take care of that. God's ONLY question is: "Are you WILLING?"  
Amen.