



Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

5th February 2012

Isaiah 40: 21-31, Psalm 147, 1 Corinthians 9: 16-23, Mark 1: 29-39

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In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen

We can readily understand today's three readings: Isaiah tells us that God is great, the creator of all. The psalm tells us it is good to sing praises to the Lord. Paul provides us with a shining example of proclaiming the gospel and mark tells us of the miraculous healing power of Jesus. Is that understanding enough – does it enliven us or are we hearing again what we've all heard before?

Isaiah begins today with *Have you not known? Have you not heard?* And again in Verse 28: *Have you not known? Have you not heard?* and then in the Gospel, (verse 36) we read that *Simon and his companions hunted for him.[Jesus]* and then it continues with them saying to Jesus: *"Everyone is searching for you."*

Even Paul, in the second reading: *If I proclaim the gospel, - in other words, if I do know and if I have heard - this gives me no ground for boasting,*

The energy in today's readings suggest that 'searching' is what gives shape and direction to our journey and to our encounter with God. That's not necessarily reflected in the common experience of 'church'. Many see that 'faith' is all about knowing and/or accepting what the church 'knows'. Throughout much of its history the church has taken on the role of Gatekeeper of 'Divine knowing'. Baptism and confirmation have been the orthodox entry points, the turnstiles of admission into the collective creed of the Church; and so often they are seen as points of arrival rather than as places at which our journey actually begins.

Simon and his companions said to Jesus *"Everyone is searching for you."* And perhaps that is more helpful picture of our reality as Church and so too a more truthful reflection of our own journeys, individually and collectively. As we read the scriptures and as we share our journey together we will discover alongside the 'knowing' that we have encountered, there is an equally important 'unknowing' to be encountered. And maybe, in order to walk forward on our journey, we must be prepared to leave behind the path that we have already walked.

The energy of today's readings: the confidence of Isaiah, the giving of Paul, the quiet intentionality of Jesus AND the searching and seeking of Simon and his companions, are all components of the energy of movement. None of them are seen to be resting in the place of 'knowing', rather, what they have 'known and heard' impels them forward... *for the sake of the gospel, (so that I may) to share in its blessings.*

We have a couple of weeks before we enter the Lenten path that will take us toward resurrection; and together we can prepare for a new beginning by 'unknowing' some of what we hold on to. Maybe we should see Shrove Tuesday as a sort of verge collection day, where we leave all our accumulated religiosity - all our past dogmas, doctrines and practices at the side of the road. We empty ourselves ready to begin the search with Simon and his companions. And our companions will be those who sit alongside us here.

To empty or open ourselves to such a journey we must allow the eyes of our 'unknowing' to read the scriptures, rather than the trained and blinkered eyes of our 'knowing'. When Isaiah asks: *"Have you not known? Have you not heard"* it is important for us to answer, no! And from that place, we can then engage the whole of life anew with an open searching.

The wisdom/insight of Isaiah speaks of being *from the beginning*, and *everlasting*. It is therefore also in the present, that which gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless is in the now. There is a confidence in the reading and it affirms that we can renew our strength and mount up with wings like eagles. When did you

last have that sense of renewal? It might well come from a new approach, such that we engage life anew; we come into our baptism, not with 'knowing', but with an 'unknowing' and so join Simon and his companions in their search, our search.

Paul, the writings attributed to Paul, are often criticised or avoided because Paul is seen as a know-all. Be open to reading Paul again as a searcher and seeker. When he says "*If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting*", it suggests that he's not there yet, he is not in the place of knowing. Certainly, Paul presents a perspective of 'knowing', he has a confident 'rightness' in his voice; however, rather than self-righteousness, that energy may well mirror the confidence of Isaiah. We hear in today's reading that what Paul does and what Paul says is: *all for the sake of the gospel*, not for himself for his own agenda – and *so that I may share in its blessings*. In seeking to "*save some*" - Paul's words - he is not seeking to parallel the TV evangelist who boasts about the size of his audience. On the contrary, in bringing the gospel into reality with and for others, and in particular with others outside of his own circle of comfort, he seeks to share in its blessings. Another orientation of 'it is in giving that we receive'.

Finally, as we look at the gospel with the eyes of unknowing, we are no longer confined by the miraculous works of Jesus. Rather we see a narrative illustrating the reality that the Divine in humanity is creative of healing activity. It is not a moment in the life of Jesus, that's what our 'knowing ears hear'. The Divine in humanity is creative of healing activity; it also casts out and silences the demons, the forces of uncreation - greed, denial, avoidance, self-obsession, fear, self-righteousness, and blind 'knowing'. The gospel tells us that those who glimpsed this truth (Simon and his companions); they hunt for the same, and in fact that everyone is searching for the same.

The gospel narrative is set within a subtle frame; it begins with: *As soon as they left the synagogue*. Then we hear, *In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed*. And in the last line we are back in the *synagogue*. The gospel setting is the Church setting. Here we go out, and we return. In between we are sustained in our life of prayer. We are renewed and refreshed in God's presence and in our journey together

It is in Giving, to the gospel, that we receive, and find ourselves soaring with eagles wings

Let's be open now, and as we approach our Lenten journey, open to share in all God's Blessings.

The Lord be with you.
Peter Humphris