

The Fifth Sunday of Epiphany

February 4, 2007

Judges 6:11-24a

Psalm 85 or 85:7-13

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Luke 5:1-11

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

I was searching for words to summarize this morning's readings: words that express just what these readings are about and why someone, I don't know whom, put them together for us.

The words that come to mind are "conversion" and "empowerment." It does seem that in each story a life is changed, and a new mission is begun. That's certainly so for Gideon in his encounter with an angel, or perhaps, with God on that threshing floor. It's so for Paul in his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, and it's so for Simon Peter on the beach at Capernaum when Jesus calls him.

Those are good descriptive words, but I think there is another point to these stories.

Just what would it be like to encounter an angel or Jesus, to have a very personal revelation? Apparently, according to scripture, revelations are accompanied by trumpets, clashing cymbals, peals of thunder, lightning bolts, heavenly angelic choirs, descending doves, tongues of flame, whirlwinds. I guess we must add burning meat and bread and, strangely enough, one talking donkey. It would seem reasonable that if all, or any, of those things happened, God

would have our full attention. But, actually, revelations may be accompanied by nothing at all.

We can have a revelation and an encounter at any moment, a moment just like any other. But do we actually live in the moment – the present moment – and actually hear and see what is plainly before us?

What if Gideon had said, “Excuse me, I have to get this grain threshed. I don’t want to be rude, but I really don’t have time to talk to you right now, perhaps later. We can do lunch some time.”

What if Paul on the road to Damascus had said, “Excuse me, I have a job to do – a very important mission, and I’m on a tight schedule. There are people waiting for me in Damascus. And, by the way, who are you really, and why are you shining that light in my eyes? That’s really dangerous. I could fall!”

What if Simon Peter had said, “Go fishing! I beg your pardon; I don’t think so! We’ve been out there all night, for hours and hours. Consider the wear and tear on the boat and on these nets, and I have to pay these people, you know! I’m sorry, this just isn’t a good time.”

That’s true. It isn’t a good time. There is no good time; there is no bad time. There’s only this time, this moment. It’s all they have. It’s all we have. What do we do with it?

It’s the present moment. It’s actually been called “The Sacrament of the Present Moment” by the French Jesuit Jean Pierre de Caussade. It’s a Sacrament because every moment of every day of our lives is an outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace of God’s presence and concern and love. Every moment is a gift; it’s that simple.

The trouble is that the Gideons of this world, and we are many, will always have just a little more grain to thresh. The Pauls of this world,

and we are many, will always have an appointment with someone, somewhere, and the Simon Peters of this world, and we are many, will always be concerned about the state of their boats and nets and the size of their payroll, and you and I will always have something to do that will draw us into the future, some important plan or some terrible dread, or something to take us back into the past, a happy memory or more likely, a deep regret. We can't help it. The tragedy is that living in the past or the future means that we miss the present moment.

All of which makes me wonder just how many angelic conversations I have missed in my life, how many possible encounters with Jesus went unnoticed because I simply wasn't there.

Being here is very, very difficult. Being here means accepting this life as it is, not as we wish it had been or would be. Being here means accepting ourselves as we are. If an angel can sit on a rock and accept us, if Jesus walking on our beach can accept us, it seems as though we can do that. What clarity we would have! Clarity to see ourselves as we are, to see the world as it is, and clarity to see and to hear that angel speaking to us and Jesus calling us.

In His Holy Name.