

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany – 2019

We don't always do Church very well...I mean Church with a capital C. We talk about going to church (or not going as the case may be!) and us Anglicans we are very much wedded to our church buildings. These are no bad things in themselves but we must think more broadly because our Biblical tradition wants us to think of Church with a capital C.

By the time that Luke had finished the first volume of his narrative what we call today his gospel, the boat had become an important symbol for the Church. In today's reading Jesus teaches from a boat and encourages his first disciples to take to their boats and put out their nets into deep water for a catch, which despite their reluctance bears fruit with an extraordinary catch. As I have often said our building resembles an upturned boat and it is significant that the body of the church is called the nave, we are all in the navy now!

So the first thing to say about Church is that we are drawn up out of deep water; the water representing the chaos of nothingness! But importantly this net drags us all up, its indiscriminate, the church is a mixed economy a gathering over which we have no choice. We are sacramentally drawn out of this deep water and given a name at baptism, we are no longer nothing we become something because we are part of this community the Church, we have a name and by it we are called.

But there is something that we must do we who have been called, and that is recognise that it is calling out of love. We have not been selected for any other reason other than love. We have not earnt this membership, we have not been 'recommended' by another member we have not passed an entrance exam or paid our subs. Now we don't altogether deal with that very well, because we tend to think of everything as somehow transactional – I do this and I get this. Both Simon Peter and Isaiah in their own way are like this, neither believe they meet the standard and both are proven wrong. For both of them they are fearful of this new way, it doesn't fit with their understanding of life and community and we are the same. We are fearful of putting our hands up sometimes. But never for one moment should we believe that we don't have a role to play, that we have not been called. Paul makes that quite clear; even Paul with his litany of stumbling blocks: Last of all, abnormal, untimely, least of the apostles, unfit, a persecutor of the church of God. We have all been called...the question is are we listening? This is Church with a capital C, it's not just somewhere we go, it's not just something we do, it is what we are... because we have been called.

The mark of this new community is worship. Peter falling on his knees, Isaiah having a vision of the heavenly realm. So what is this worship

about? As you all know our particular brand of worship is predominantly Eucharistic, in other words we gather to give thanks! Now those of you who have been hanging around me know that I rather like doing this in particular way! But let me assure you, it's not all about dressing up, it's not all about the finer points of ritual, these are merely the means by which we express the beauty and the otherness of the God we worship, we have indeed been drawn out of the deep into this boat and it is beautiful, it is other worldly! We worship because we are thankful that we have been called.

When we look carefully at the ministry and teaching of Jesus, in the miracles, in the healings, in his life and death it is all about being at one with God, being at peace. So what is at the heart of our faith which calls us to give thanks? It is quite simply determined by whether or not you believe Jesus when he tells you that God welcomes you. That is the 'test' of being at peace with God and belonging with God's people: do you believe Jesus when he tells you that God welcomes you? If you do, anything is possible; if you don't, nothing is possible.

This idea of being caught might seem a little off putting; but Luke is very careful in his words. This is not case of being lured into a net or onto a hook! Luke's language is that of being gathered and this welcome that we are offered becomes a reality when we too extend a welcome. In the gospels there is this two fold idea that Jesus welcomes us but also gives us freedom to welcome him (and therefore others). When I read about the miraculous catch I can't but think about the way that John in his gospel interprets this story. John takes the story a step further; it takes place after the resurrection, there is an amazing catch, the risen Jesus then meets the disciples on the beach, and they eat breakfast together. Just like in today's account Jesus then has an encounter with Peter, feed my sheep he says. Invite others, bring them along, care for them. This is what Eucharist living is all about, knowing that we are welcomed, welcoming others and welcoming Jesus.

I want us to lay aside those misconceptions about 'going to church' which so easily creep in, and recognise that we have been called and for that we are thankful. This is why, among other things, I want us to engage in this year of learning together, to engage more deeply in our text and traditions and to know and understand its great treasure and its great worth. There are some who say that this particular type of boat that we have been hauled into is taking on water! That we may sink without a trace! Well I for one am not going down without a fight, We are not simply about bailing out and keeping afloat, I want us to put our nets into the deep! And then to put up a sail and catch the wind of the spirit.
Amen.