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Epiphany 5C
Peace, Seattle
February 7, 2010 epk
Isaiah 6:1-8; Luke 5:1-11

NOT OUT OR AROUND BUT THROUGH

I can't say I remember what I'd said. I can't say I remember when I'd said it. And I can't say I remember if or how I was provoked. But I sure do remember the taste of Dial soap as mother "washed out my mouth" with it. Some of you know what I'm talking about. I think Isaiah did.

I heard the voice of my mother calling; Isaiah, he heard the voice of God, and both of us wanted to find a place where we could hide, where we could go undiscovered.

Of course, his reasons for being reluctant were different and much more profound than mine. **But we both had it in us to find a way out or around rather than through.** I guess that's human nature.

Moses tried to use a speech impediment as his excuse for not answering God's call.[1]
For Jeremiah the excuse was age. I'M ONLY A KID! He said. Too young, to serve as a spokesman for the Almighty. [2]

Gideon came from the very least family of the weakest clan of a beleaguered people—and couldn't imagine how he could possibly be of any use to God.[3]

Isaiah, likewise, was eager to find a way far from the line of fire.

> "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!" - Isaiah 6:5

But none of these leaders were successful in eluding God's call to servanthood.
Each of them thought their personal limitations were too big to be overcome.
And in each case, God provided what was needed in order for them to succeed.

- For Moses, God provided Aaron as a spokesman.
- For Gideon, God patiently proved time after time that he receive what was needed to complete his task.
- For Jeremiah God provided the courage and fortitude of a mature man—and divine backing.
- And for Isaiah, God provided a live coal to purify his lips and blot out his sins.

They all became instruments of God's purposes in spite of their limitations.
God's strength was made perfect in their weakness.

The point, for starters, is this: God can take whatever raw material we give him and fashion it into an instrument that'll keep working under the most challenging conditions imaginable.

And speaking of raw material, the WARM UP AMERICA project has taken a different raw material—a skein of yarn, and through the labor of individuals whose only connection may be the desire to care, turns that raw material into a tangible gesture of love and creates community in the process.

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[1] See Exodus 4:1-17
[2] See Jeremiah 1:4-10
[3] See Judges 6-8

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During Epiphany our gospel readings have helped us discover God's agenda for the world as revealed in Jesus. In that unveiling, one thing becomes clear right away: Jesus isn't interested in finding a way out or around; only through. And he doesn't want to do it alone. So he calls a community around him.

In today's gospel it's Peter's turn. Peter's on shore after a long night of fishing with nothing to show for it, and Jesus tells him: Put your boat out into deeper water and let down your nets.

You can imagine the conversation going on in Peter's head when he hears this ridiculous suggestion. But Peter, reluctantly, does what Jesus says—and the catch is so huge that it starts the nets to ripping and the boats to sinking.

Peter, who thought he knew fishing inside out, is humbled. Sensing that something HOLY has broken into his world of boats and nets, bent backs and cracked fingers, he starts sounding like Isaiah:

"Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

But Jesus will have none of that. "Don't be afraid; from now on you'll be catching people."

His words do more than console—they TRANSFORM.

When Isaiah's lips were touched with the live coal, his whole attitude shifts radically.
That cleansing coal does more than purify; it's fires reached inside, too.

WOE IS ME! becomes, HERE I AM, LORD! SEND ME!

The reluctance is gone; the reservations have disappeared.
Hesitancy and fear have been replaced by a burning desire to BE and to DO for God.

Sisters and Brothers, God's call comes in many forms, and reaches us through many voices.

Over the next four weeks you'll be reading examples of God's call excerpted from the lives of the people you're sitting with today. They're in the **LEGACY 2 DEVOTIONAL** you'll be taking home. Some of the stories are unique and very personal, yet I think—I hope—you'll sense in these stories, as I have in collecting them, an echo resonating in your own lives.

To grow in faith, hope, love, and obedience is to heed the voice of Jesus calling us to deeper water.

- The shoreline may be safer.
- The shallow water may be less risky.
- No doubt we'd feel much less vulnerable if we'd never went in over our heads!
- But that's not where Christ calls us to be!

Some of you here today are experiencing changes, perhaps even crises, in your lives.
You're wondering what those changes mean and where your life is headed.
The water's up to HERE (neck) and you're wondering whether you've got it within you to keep afloat; and wondering, too, where and how God is mixed up in all this.

At times like these we may feel desperate for a way out or around.
But when our lives are bound to the Crucified and Risen One, there's only one way forward. **Through.**

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For that's where he leads us…together.

GO AHEAD, PUT OUT INTO THOSE DEEP WATERS. Christ tells us.
TRUST ME, AND DON'T BE AFRAID.
I'M RIGHT BESIDE YOU. AND I'LL REMAIN HERE WITH YOU. ALWAYS.

The God we meet in Jesus is the God who's with us for the duration.

Who has called us in baptism and nourished us at the table so we might follow him wherever that following may take us, confident that we will receive what we need to complete the mission. Confident that we are not alone.

Thanks be to God! Amen.