

**A Sermon for The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany
February 9, 2025**



New Life Episcopal Church, Uniontown, OH

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[Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany – The Episcopal Church](#)

Isaiah 6:1-13, Luke 5:1-11

Called in sacred space and on the water

In our first reading, we hear about the call of Isaiah, the great prophet. This famous event takes place in the Temple in Jerusalem, and Isaiah appears to be in a trance. He sees God on a high throne, and sees angels swirling around, singing Holy, holy, holy. Isaiah feels lost in the smoke and he groans, "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips. And yet I have seen the Lord!" An accommodating angel flies by, grabs a live coal from the temple altar with a pair of tongs, and burns Isaiah's lips, cleansing them with fire and cleansing Isaiah of his guilt. Having come through this ordeal of fire, Isaiah knows what to say when God wonders, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Isaiah answers, "Here am I. Send me." And God sends Isaiah to prophesy to the people.

It is a very impressive scene, inspiring Isaiah, and inspiring countless people of faith ever since. I have a beautiful illustration of this scene, from the St. John's Bible, showing Isaiah down at the bottom of the page, the angel applying the live coal to his lips, God at the top of the page, and angels everywhere. I'll leave this out for you to look at. It is dream-like. I'm not sure I would want to have a dream like that, yet I have, and probably you have too. When God calls, you reply, "Here am I. Send me." This calling of Isaiah occurs in a sacred place, the temple filled with angels. The year was about 750 BC.

Fast forward about 750 years, and Jesus is issuing a call to his disciples. This time it does not happen in a sacred space, but on the water. Jesus is in Simon Peter's boat on the lake of Gennesaret, preaching to the people. Concluding the sermon, he asks Peter to put the boat out into deep water and lower the fishing nets. Peter objects, saying it won't do any good because the fishermen have been fishing all night and caught nothing. But since Jesus is asking, OK then, they let down the nets. The result? So many fish it just about swamps the boat. Peter regrets his doubt and pleads with Jesus to go away from his sin. Jesus is cheerful about this and says, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." Yes, it is another call, by Jesus, to his first disciples, most of whom were clueless, but they did notice all the fish. Jesus tells them they are called to something else, fishing for people instead, and so they drop everything and follow Jesus.

Stories about answering a sacred call are very exciting. Isaiah's call is told in archetypal grandeur, in the temple, God on the throne, angels everywhere. Isaiah lived up to his sacred call. Jesus, called by God at his baptism, by a voice from heaven, is extending The Call to his disciples, right where they work, out in the world, on the water. Jesus's own call involved water too – just as we are called in our baptism to new life in Christ by water and the Spirit.

So, what are a bunch of fishermen supposed to do, now that they are like fish out of water? Ah, therein lies the tale. We are all called. What are we supposed to do with it?

Our baptismal covenant tells us how to live in the world, how we promise to be faithful in worship and respond to the needs of others. But what about the specifics? What are we supposed to DO?

Your vestry would like to guide us into action this year. They have decided to adopt the principles of Natural Church Development, to develop our parish and ourselves into more effective followers of Christ. Those of you with long memories may recall this process from about twenty years ago, when the Rev Stephanie Pace led you through renewal by concentrating on Passionate Spirituality. The process had many practical steps and you were very successful in awakening your spiritual lives, in the parish and in your private lives. This is still a very spiritually alive community.

Vestry has chosen another topic that we can develop: Need-oriented Evangelism. In a way, it is rather like Jesus calling his disciples to follow him, and they do. We are not literally fishermen, leaving our nets to follow Jesus, but we are his followers, and we are metaphorically fishing for people. We want to make our community more inviting and visible. What can we DO? Well, there are lots of possibilities.

Don't be scared of that word Evangelism. It is not about standing on street corners and preaching to passers-by. It is about discerning what changes we can make, what practical steps we can take, to develop our own congregation. Our goals include improving our visibility – alas, it is not easy to find this building. Maybe we need more signs? Maybe we need more visibility with our neighbors? Maybe we need more digital exposure? How about enlarging our activities, all of which are already wonderful – but how about some more? We are forming a team to work on this concept. Would you like to be part of it? It is actually a pretty exciting venture. We need two or three more people to join the team and bring their own inspiration. If you think you can participate, let me or Senior Warden Larry Mackey know. I hope we can be off and running soon. Be part of the adventure! And if you are not able to devote the time or energy to serve on the team, that's OK too. Stay tuned for what develops. We are all called to serve, and we can do that in many ways. We are all followers of Jesus, answering our call.

God asks, Who shall I send? And we answer, Here am I. Send me.