

I speak to you in the name of God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.
Please be seated.

In our readings appointed for this morning, we have a unifying theme about becoming aware of the mysterious presence of God as we experience life.

In our Old Testament passage from Isaiah, we hear about Isaiah becoming intensely aware of God's presence in the year that King Uzziah died. He gives us a rather dramatic account of seeing God and seeing angels; one of which interacts with him by touching a hot coal to his lips as a sign of absolution. He goes on to describe a kind of shaking of the Temple's foundations and the Temple filling with smoke. This encounter with God is experienced through all of Isaiah's senses, and yet, he still hesitates when God first calls to him. In this sense, we can take some comfort from Isaiah's experience. If a spiritual giant like Isaiah can hesitate at God's first call, then perhaps that explains why we are sometimes hesitant to answer with the word, "yes" when God calls on us – because he has called each and every one of us at some point leading up to today, and He will undoubtedly call upon each and every one of us again after today. The key, as we see with Isaiah this morning, is being open to the presence of God in our lives and taking the time to work through and discern what that experience means. The other point that we can glean from this passage is that God will give us grace in that moment of hesitation to accept his call.

Our New Testament reading from 1 Corinthians is the continuation of the letter that Paul wrote to the people of Corinth to provide them with guidance and advice once he had left them to establish a new Christian community on Ephesus. At points in this letter, Paul has had to be quite stern with the people of Corinth as he impresses upon them the importance of behaving and living as a Christian community, with love and compassion. But he has also been encouraging them to become aware of their God-given gifts and talents and to exercise those in the

building up of the body of Christ. Paul uses this portion of his letter to review the events surrounding the resurrection and to emphasize the point that the resurrection is the pivotal event that is the basis for Christianity. Without that belief, Paul tells them that their community life is in vain. Paul then goes on to describe the various mysterious encounters that the disciples had with the risen Christ – including his own experience which changed everything in his life; specifically, he ended his persecution of Christians and, instead, became a leader who taught and effectively recruited others to the newly emerging Christian movement. Paul felt that it was most important to lead by example, and he strove to use the remaining years of his life to be a Christian in the truest sense. We know that Paul's encounter with the Divine was very dramatic and that, despite everything he had done to that point to denounce God and Christians, he felt God's presence, heard his call, and responded in the affirmative by drawing upon God's grace. Throughout the rest of his life, Paul remained keenly aware of the contrast between his life before his encounter with God and his life afterwards.

Our Gospel reading from Luke this morning also picks up from where we left off last Sunday. By chapter 5, Jesus is fully into his ministry, although encountering some problems along the way. At this stage, he has come to realize that he needs to mentor and to teach the disciples in order for them to be able to spread the good news throughout the region once he is gone. We don't know at this point in the Gospel of Luke if Jesus knows the time limits of his ministry, but we do get the sense that he feels that working with a group of disciples will ultimately be more effective than going it alone. Although we have come to think of this story as the classic call to Christian service, we have to remember that it was the experience of Jesus' presence and the miracle of the fish that convinced Simon, James, and John to figuratively become fishers of people rather than to remain as literal fishers of fish. There is a call from God, expressed through the

words and actions of Jesus, that these 3 men respond to. However, as with Isaiah and Paul, we are reminded that they needed to receive and rely upon the grace of God in order to move forward into becoming disciples. Simon clearly expresses his doubts that God would or should call upon him for service because he sees himself as unworthy. This also echoes the experiences and responses of Isaiah and Paul. And yet, Simon, James and John walked away from everything in their lives – their homes, their livelihoods, their families, their connections to their community – in order to fully respond to this call. In our present day culture, that kind of response is almost unthinkable.

There are times when our 21st century lifestyles can interfere with our abilities to experience the mystery of God's presence. When we are not necessarily attentive to that presence because of the way that we live, it makes it more difficult for us to hear the call of God. And when we can't hear that call, we also can't feel the offering of God's grace that comes with that call. We are reminded in 3 quite dramatic stories this morning that there are 3 elements to this process – an experience, a call, and an offer of grace. God never leaves us to our own devices and limitations when he needs us to do something. But he does leave it to us to exercise our freewill to choose to accept or reject that call. He also gives us the responsibility for discerning that call and drawing upon examples of others in both the Old and New Testaments who have had similar struggles; albeit in a different era.

While these three readings for this morning are always a timely ones for us as a Christian community, they are particularly important for us to consider as we engage in our annual general meetings. I know that we tend to think of AGMs as rather dry sessions as we review the business of the church. But they are also important opportunities for us to come together to try to discern God's call to our parishes. What direction does God need us to follow in the months ahead? How is

he calling each of us to participate in that call? What talents and gifts might we exercise in achieving that call? Again, it is important to remember that God will give us grace to both accept and to act upon this call in the year ahead. And so, I invite you to spend some time over the coming weeks – individually or as a group – to dream about the future of ACPC. What growth might we experience in 12 months’ time that would allow us to more fully live out our mission as a Christian community in this county? God has given us the gifts of imagination and creativity to see a new path forward. I look forward to hearing your thoughts as these coming weeks unfold. Amen.