

**February 9, 2025 – Revd Wim Kuiper**  
**Anglican Church Arnhem & Nijmegen**

Readings: Isa 6.1-8, Ps 138, 1 Cor 15.1-11, Luke 5.1-11

Now we may have left the season of Epiphany, but in today's Gospel reading it is again about an epiphany. Today we focus on Christ's manifestation to those three persons that would become the first three disciples of Jesus and who would remain his closest throughout: Simon, later known as Peter, and the sons of Zebedee, called James and John. Ordinary fishermen, whom Jesus meets as they are washing their nets, after a whole night of fishing on the lake without any catch. They must have been not only completely worn out because of their hard, nightly labour, but also because that had been utterly useless; no catch meaning no income today. And now they see an unusual crowd closing in on their boats. All those people who want to see and listen to this great new teacher and healer. His words, as Luke explains to us, the words of God, are making quite an impression on them. Peter and Jesus were already acquainted with each other as we can read in the previous chapter. Jesus had stayed over in Peter's house in Capernaum, and had healed his mother-in-law who suffered from a high fever. So it is not very surprising that Jesus now enters Peter's boat and uses it as a platform, one could say an interesting kind of pulpit, for his outdoor teaching. But Luke does not tell us what Jesus is teaching about, because the focus of this story should be on what happens next. The story takes a surprising turn when Jesus, after ending his speech, tells Peter 'to put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch'. Why would Peter and his two companions James and John, feel compelled to do this at broad daylight, when the chances of catching fish would have been even smaller than at night. And they were also quite tired, weren't they? But they simply trust this rabbi called Jesus. They have a strong feeling that it is just right to obey him. As Peter puts it: 'But because you say so, I will let down the nets'. And what a joy it turns out to be, when they, surprisingly, catch this huge amount of fish. It was almost too much to handle. There could be only one explanation; this was a sign from God. Jesus surely is a godly man, a manifestation of God himself. And this epiphany, brings Peter automatically on his knees. Catching a glimpse of God's glory, being confronted with God's abundant grace and mercy, humbles Peter. It makes him feel unworthy, aware of his own insignificance and sinfulness and it even frightens him. He echoes the reaction of Isaiah in our first reading when he saw the Lord. 'Woe is me, I am ruined.'

This is an understandable reaction to these kind of strong religious experiences. The sense of trepidation and fear, combined with a sense of one's own insignificance, smallness and indeed sinfulness, when encountering, experiencing that breathtaking divine presence; perfect in power, love and purity (as our first hymn today expresses it). Experiences that can be ours as well. And so it is also important for us to continue to hear those calming words of Jesus. Words that light up again and again in the Gospels: 'Do not be afraid.' This is the key for Simon, James and John to take that very courageous step towards a new life with Jesus. No further conversation or explanation is reported by Luke. He simply gives us this line that tells it all: 'So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.' What an astonishing thing to do. Not even cashing in on that abundant catch of fish, nor selling their boats, or saying goodbye to their loved ones.

It is this kind of straight away obedience, that we can also observe in our other two readings. Reminding us of two very different but equally sudden moments of epiphany and calling; one of Saint Paul to become an apostle, and the other of Isaiah to become a prophet. We hear Isaiah's obedient answer to the Lord's question 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' Isaiah just says: 'Here am I. Send me!' Isaiah, Paul, Simon Peter, James and John, all of them had these life changing encounters with the Lord, followed by a special calling upon them. And they all respond in the right way: humble and obedient, willing to let their lives be changed for good. Willing to be used as God's instruments.

And so their lives started indeed to bear much fruit. Fruits that have lasted well beyond their wildest expectations, as their stories continue to inspire many all over the world, until this very day, hopefully also us.

Our own encounters with God the Father, with God in Jesus, with God's Holy Spirit, may have been and may be less sudden, less miraculous and less spectacular. Our callings may feel much smaller than the callings of those great Biblical role models. But if we stay open to such encounters and callings, we can also continue to have them. Encounters that may entail invitations to change course, to leave things behind and to follow Jesus in surprisingly new and sometimes daring ways. Our journey alongside him may bring us into deep waters and on unexpected roads. It may make us say words that we would have never imagined ourselves to say. Make us do things that those around us may find utterly strange, and the world we live in may regard as incomprehensible. But let us continue to do so, as we hear Jesus saying, again to us this day, that we should not be afraid. And let us be strengthened on this wonderful journey with our Lord and Saviour, as he gives himself to us, again on this day, at the eucharist as a token of God's abundant love for us. Amen