

## From The Pastor

A wide range of reasons can make a person feel unworthy. Perhaps the most immediate and apparent reason is the challenge and the grace of positive self-esteem. The person who finds it difficult to hold themself in positive self-regard will more quickly consider themself unworthy. Worth is, at times, relative to the circumstance. In a quantifiable sense, one player will be more worthy to be a starter than another player. Some persons are more worthy because of greater competence or skill. In this arena, it is a valid measure of going forward.

In the spiritual sense, worth has more to do with value than with competence. God does not account us worthy because we attain a certain level of competence or productivity in spiritual matters. For God we are valuable simply because we are. As the saying goes, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. God is the beholder, and in the divine eye, all have endless worth and value just by being.

Still further, presuming mature self-love and acceptance regardless of competence or value, there is the experience of being unworthy in the presence of the divine. In the presence of the fascinating, yet terrifying presence of God, one cannot help but feel unworthy. Even the most secure self-esteem and positive self-regard will feel small in the presence of the mystery of God. We are dignified with inestimable worth because God accounts us so, yet the divine power of God remains totally other.

This is the experience of Isaiah in the first reading. Last week we read the call of Jeremiah; today we hear the call of Isaiah. Isaiah has a vision in which he experiences the presence and majesty of God. Though he knows and loves God in faith, Isaiah is overcome with fear and unworthiness. He fears for his life, yet at the same time, he is fascinated by the experience. 'Woe is me, I am doomed', he cries, mindful of his smallness and sinfulness before God. However, God has a purpose for this experience. Isaiah defers to the power of God and accepts the action of God's purification. The hot ember touching his lips expresses healing and forgiveness, as well as empowerment. Now empowered by the grace of God's call, Isaiah is ready to be sent according to God's will.

This is the consistent pattern in nearly all of the call narratives in scripture. God calls, the person shrinks in unworthiness and fear, expresses resistance to the power of God, and then empowered by the gift of grace, yields to the call. It becomes clear that unworthiness is not a valid reason or excuse to resist or put off God's call. In one sense we are unworthy, but in the greater sense we are completely worthy because God accounts us so.

Peter is the next example. His religious experience is much different from Isaiah's. It comes in the nitty-gritty of his daily life. He knows fishing, and he knows oodles of fish don't just show up in a net just a few feet off shore. Peter is astonished. He is also fascinated and terrified. He likely feels naked and exposed. Perceiving the power and truth of God in Jesus, he does the only reasonable thing. He pleads unworthiness and admits being a sinner. Terrified and awestruck, he is still drawn to Jesus.

This is a two-fold experience for Peter. He is deeply moved by the power and light of Jesus, while at the same time he sees his inner self as never before. This is the light and the power of conversion that reveals in stark reality the difference between the power of God and the smallness of us. Jesus is fully aware of all that is taking place, and quickly assures Peter, 'Do not be afraid, from now on you will catch men'. Call, fearful awe, resistance, healing grace, yielding response. It is the same for all of us. If God has a plan for our lives, God knows how to get his way.

St. Paul is the last example. His conversion is well known to us. Overwhelming light on the road to Damascus, fall to the ground, voice heard, question asked as resistance, struck blind to begin healing, yielding and response with great faith. Now active in ministry, Paul is preaching the gospel to all who will hear it. He admits his unworthiness to be an apostle, and the abnormal way that God had called him. In the end, Paul is transformed by the grace of God and is fully confident in its power. 'By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been ineffective'.

How about us? Does God still call people today? The answer is a resounding yes. The ways and the means may be different, but God is clearly calling many to the life of the gospel. All are worthy, and all are needed to bring about the fullness of the Kingdom. It is neither valid nor true to use unworthiness as an excuse. All have God given talents and gifts that reveal the power and the love of God for the world.

Jesus tells Peter to 'put out into deep water'. These powerful words are the beginning of the call. Are you willing to go deep into the heart and soul of your life and listen for the call of God? This is a real question for people of every age. God is calling, but it seems not so many are listening. To go deep is the invitation. It is never a command. Notice Peter hesitated, but in the end did as Jesus asked. He gained not only a great load of fish, but also a new and powerful life he could never have imagined. That can be true for each of us. Go deep with the Lord, and see the power and the call that is on your life.

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