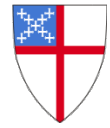




Sermon for the Fifth Sunday in Epiphany Feb. 9, 2025



St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene
The Rev. Dr. David Gortner

[Isaiah 6:1-8, \[9-13\]](#)

[Psalm 138](#)

[1 Corinthians 15:1-11](#)

[Luke 5:1-11](#)

*O LORD, your love endures for ever;
do not abandon the works of your hands.
Set us free, O Christ, to follow where you lead. Amen.*

Good morning, everyone! Good morning, and God's blessing. Good morning on this chilly Sunday. It looks like we are finally having winter this month! We are grateful for the snow that is accumulating in our mountains – and we know how to deal with the snow here in town.

Welcome to our annual meeting Sunday! It's one of the few times we come together, bringing those who usually come at 8am and those who come at 10am together for a shared service of worship. It is good to have us all together in one place. After the service, we join together in sharing food and conversation as we have our annual meeting. On Super Bowl Sunday! Who had that great idea? Don't worry, we'll be done in plenty of time to set up for the game. Chiefs and Eagles. Hmm. My prediction? One team will win. And there will be commercials.

With all that is going on around us, in the world, and even with bigtime entertainments that give us all a time of release and escape, this week we as a church take a moment together to reflect on who we are, whose we are, what we are here for, and what is our calling in this time and place.

This week is our church's annual meeting. It has been a good year together, with much we have accomplished and much that we desire to do for the love of Christ. In preparation for this Sunday and in practice into the oncoming week and beyond, on Friday I invited you to a daily prayerful meditation. I am inviting you now to enter this meditation with me on this piece from the prophet Isaiah we just heard today, what Isaiah heard and said as he had his vision of God enthroned in breathtaking glory. We are gathered now in God's name, stirred together to fuller awareness of God's presence:

'Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "**Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?**"
And I said, "**Here am I; send me!**"'

"Here am I; send me!"

For each of us, now, are these questions:

Where is God asking me to go? What is my response?

Am I ready to say, "Here I am, send me"?

It does not matter how old or how young you are. It does not matter what you have or have not done before. Now. Now, this day and this coming week. Now, in this time in history and in this place. Here and now. Where is God asking me to go? Am I ready to say, "Here I am, send me"?

God's call is rarely to greater comfort and ease. Abraham and Sarah spend decades of their lives following a call of God that at times seems elusive. Moses takes on God's call even after anxiously resisting it. Deborah and Barak, Gideon, and others awakened to God's stirring, and it took them into battle for the soul of their people. Samuel was just a boy, and after he responded and said, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening," God gave Samuel a hard task of saying hard truths to his mentor, Eli. Isaiah sees a vision of God's heaven and throne – and after responding, "Here am I, send me," hears God give him a hard message to speak to his fellow citizens. Mary accepts God's direct request of her, and her world is changed as she bears and raises Jesus.

We pray for God to act. Throughout scripture and throughout our history, God's response is most often to call, stir, and awaken people to act, to make a difference in their own time and place. Here and now.

So, for us today as a church, what is our shared response to God's call for this time and place? *What is God asking us to do, as a faith community? Where are we being sent?*

In 2024, our goals focused on five key areas: strengthening spiritual life, strengthening relationships inside & outside the church, strengthening shared leadership, and strengthening our buildings. At our meeting after the service, we'll look at how we did with these goals and what kinds of things we did in relation to each of them. We will continue with these same goals this year – because, our work is not done, we have more of this race to run, more of this strengthening to do, more of this journey to take together in order to make this community and this place a bright witness to the boundless love of God.

None of us follow Christ alone. None of us do the work of Christ alone. None of us bring the full light of Christ alone to the world around us. St. Luke's knows this truth – we are the church together. None of this happened because of one person alone – and certainly not because of

your priest acting alone or any church member acting alone. It takes a village. We work and grow together, sometimes in sync, sometimes in parallel, sometimes in harmony, but always aware of each other and sharing in a common purpose. Everyone has played a part in this body of Christ that we share and offer to the world around us. We are continuing to grow in our readiness and openness to let our light shine brightly.

Today, and every Sunday, and in some way every day of our lives, we kneel and rise before God, and we hear God call out. Even as we hear the news of the day and week, even as we see the challenges of people around us, and even as we wrestle with our own frailty and limitations – we hear the voice of the Lord saying, "**Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?**"

And we say, "**Here am I; send me!**"

Say it with me: "**Here am I; send me!**"

We don't say this out of arrogance, that we will be the great solution. We say this with some trepidation and some recognition that there is a risk involved in saying "Yes" to God's invitation. And – we say this only after recognizing the truth that we have been small and petty, we have dishonored the image of God in ourselves and others, we have not been clean of heart and mind. We begin with honesty about ourselves, in God's enlightening and revealing presence. With our honesty about ourselves, God brings cleansing and a fresh beginning. And so it is, day after day through our lives. We rise, and to the opportunities that we hear God putting before us, we say, "**Here am I; send me!**"

Say it with me: "**Here am I; send me!**"

And we are sufficient. Each of us, a bearer of the image of God. Together, woven as Christ's body. No matter what our faults and frailties and fallibilities, we are embraced and strengthened by God, and invited to give of ourselves just as we are. Like the apostle Paul said to the mixed-up church in Corinth, "by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain." As the saying goes, "warts and all." And, "There, for the grace of God, go I."

When I called, you answered me;
you increased my strength within me.

Here am I; send me! Warts and all – Here I am.

Set us free, O Christ, to follow where you lead.

Where we are sent may not always be comfortable. But the way of Christ is not a way of comfort. Let me say this again: The way of Christ is not a way of comfort.

The way of Christ is a way of full, open, vulnerable living. The way of Christ is the way of emptying ourselves and offering ourselves. The way of Christ is the way of the cross.

In this week's Gospel reading, we find Jesus as he lives the life of someone called and sent by God. We find Jesus with his feet on the sandy shore of the Galilean Lake. We find Jesus being backed toward the water as people crowd around him to hear him. How many of you have been to northern Africa or the Middle East, or other places including here in this country where people don't stand in neat lines to get where they want to go? Have you been in the press of a crowd of people not lined up but swarming around the gateway to get on a ferry or a train? I remember when my wife and I were getting ready to board a ferry from Spain to Morocco on our honeymoon. It was a mass mob scene getting on that boat! Now, imagine being on the receiving end of that press of people. We then find Jesus taking an available opportunity – climbing into Peter's boat, uninvited and without asking, so that he could preach to the crowd on the shore from a bit of distance out in the shallow water. And then, after finishing his teaching with the crowd, Jesus calls on Peter to take the boat out into deeper water.

"Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."

"Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing.

Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

(from Luke 5)

We may be tired. We may think our work is all wrapped up or all defined by and confined in the schedules we keep. We may have just spent a long time trying our best and felt fruitless in our efforts. We may not like the idea of going out into the deep water, so far from the security of solid ground.

But, even with our objections, we can respond with willingness to take those first steps, to take to the oars and row out, to lift our sail and let ourselves be carried to those waters out there.

We, the community of St. Luke's here in Coeur d'Alene and North Idaho and far eastern Washington, we continue to hold firmly to the faith and message that has been passed on to us through generations here and in all the places from which we come. It is now our boat to steer. It is now.

Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you keep me safe; *
you stretch forth your hand against the fury of my enemies;
your right hand shall save me.

This word from St. Paul to the church in Corinth, hear now as a call to us:
Hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you.

***"Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."
"Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing.
Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."
(from Luke 5)***

What is the deeper water we are asked to go to?

Set us free, O Christ, to follow where you lead.

To follow where you lead us into deeper spiritual life

To follow where you lead is into more open-hearted relationships in this faith community, our neighborhoods, our work and schools, and throughout our lives

To follow where you lead us into sharing in service and leadership with each other

To follow where you lead us as we continue our care of this place as a space for worship, fellowship, learning, and service for generations to come

To follow where you lead us into the communities around us, to people around us, to the challenging situations and opportunities around us

We are who we are, God. Warts and all, we are here together, praying to you.

Here we are, Lord. Send us.

Here am I, Lord. Send me.

Set us free, O Emmanuel, to follow where you lead.

Amen.