

February 4, 2007

I'd like to share a poem from Steven K. Schou a pastor of Peace Lutheran Church, Dickinson North Dakota.

Epiphany

They might have looked foolish,
Those wise men,
Leaving their books, following a star.
Leaving all behind:
Dreams of the way things might have been
Or yet might be domestic, dogmatic, dignified dreams—
They abandoned all for the learning of fools:
Experience, where words meet flesh and blood, and words fail.
They might have looked foolish,
Giving up tenure,
Ordination,
Speculation in higher things;
Giving up all, except hunger and cold -
Madmen driven to the desert to find God.
All of their wisdom,
All of their words,
Distilled into darkness,
And a star.
They might have looked foolish,
Traveling by night
Like bandits bearing treasure
Or lovers driven by desire,
Traveling by starlight down that long road
From the ivory tower
To a stable
Where words meet flesh and blood
And words fail,
And all is changed, and all is
One.

In hindsight we call them Kings and Wise men. Knowing what we know now, we hold them in high regard. Back then they probably did look foolish . What would you think of someone who was following a star looking for God?

Speaking of looking foolish, what would you call someone who describes himself as a man with unclean lips living among a people of unclean lips, someone who asks to do a real Mission Impossible?

, He is told to go to these people who are not listening to God are not looking to God, so they can't understand what God is trying to make them understand. He is to go to these people and say, you know what 'Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.'

His job is not to make them see and hear and understand but to 10 make their minds dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so they won't turn and be healed."

Who would take on a job like that? The prophet Isaiah would.

We read the scriptures how God was revealed to him. We read how Isaiah and the Seraphs in the glory of the revealed Master of the Universe see their own unworthiness and sinfulness. We read how Isaiah's lips are cleansed by the burning coal.

I've heard of washing your mouth out with soap, but cleansing with a burning coal, he must have had some very unclean lips. We look at this situation in hind sight we can begin to understand how God is using Isaiah as a messenger to bring his people back into relationship with him.

At the time it looks like a thankless, hopeless, foolish thing for Isaiah to take on.

And then in our gospel reading today if we resist the urge to look ahead to the future, if we try to see things as the people back then would have, we would see what appears to be a lot of foolishness.

Jesus who is not a fisherman. We know he was a carpenter's son I don't recall any stories about Jesus and Joseph going fishing. Jesus tells Peter the one who is the fisherman, fishes for a living. Peter has most likely been fishing all of his life. Jesus tells Peter, put out to the deeper water for a catch.

We know that Peter thought this was foolishness. He had been out all night and caught nothing. The nets were clean and dry. He tries to tell Jesus. We have been out all night and have caught nothing. It's not in writing but I think you can hear the sigh. You can hear it can't you. We have been out all night and have caught nothing. (Sigh) Yet if you say so, we will let down our nets. Jesus either doesn't hear the sigh or ignores it and you know the rest of the story. There were tons of fish. Listening to Jesus to go out to the deep and let down his nets seemed foolish at the time. But in hind sight it's a different story.

The tons of fish are of course miraculous. Perhaps the more important miracle is that a light goes on for Peter.

It is as if he is sitting beside Isaiah, when Isaiah sees the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs flying around trying to cover up their inadequacies revealed by the glory of the Lord. Isaiah said, "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; ...

(Luke 5:8-10) But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man

Peter, James and John do what appears to be a very silly thing. It may be very hard picture. It is very hard to put our selves into the minds of these disciples because we read the rest of the story.

But how smart does it sound to leave your vocation, your way of making a living, your place in

society, in your family? Doesn't it sound scary and at least a little foolish to drop everything and follow this religious man? It's so hard to really put ourselves in Peter's position? We can't get the rest of the story out of our head. We can't get the fact that Jesus was the messiah. We can't get Jesus and his death and resurrection out of our head. And I really don't want you to. I don't want you to get Jesus out of your head.

The question is what made these people do what the rest of the world thinks is foolish? It's because they were captivated. Not captured that's a situation that is finite. You're captured the game is over. When you are captivated it's just begun. You are lead to action.

The negative example I think would be possessed. Possessed has such a negative connotation. For example, being possessed by the Devil, that would be a bad thing. Captivated by God of course is a good thing a very good thing.

The jury is still out as to whether or not the Super Bowl is captivating or a possession.

The Wise men were captivated by the desire to find God. Isaiah and Peter, James and John were captivated by God leading them into servant hood.

Jesus told Peter, James and John do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people. He's not asking, he is declaring it as a statement of fact. Not "will you"? Instead "You will".

Someone suggested that rather than use the word "catch" or "capture," Instead of translating the Greek word as "catching" people we translate it "captivate" people. One can be "captivated" by beauty or charm or excellence. We dont think that thats a bad thing.

Can we learn to captivate people with Jesus' love? Can we learn to captivate people with God's life-giving grace? Can we talk about our own discipleship as being captivated by Christ?

Rick Warren in his book the "Purpose Driven Life" says that it is natural for churches to grow. Churches naturally grow like children. If a child or a church isn't growing something is getting in the way.

In that same vain a homiletic professor Mike Rogness told us that the best thing you can do in a sermon is to make sure you don't get in the Holy Spirit's way. During the Reformation Luther said that the Holy Spirit was being inhibited by boring sermons.

Instead of trying to do the captivating maybe we should try to see what is getting in the way of St. Ansgar's growing. Find out the things that are hindering growth and remove them. Get them out of the way so that the Spirit can do its job.

As Jesus' love captivates us, let us not be afraid to fail or to appear to be foolish to the world around us. Let us instead, be examples of how being captivated by Jesus' love leads us to be his servant.

Let us be examples of Christ's captivating love. May we serve the Lord and give thanks to God.