

## **RESPONDING TO GOD**

Epiphany 5B

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There are several themes that run through our readings today. One of those themes is how do we listen to and respond to God?

The model response to God is found in the response of Peter's mother in law. It is important once again to look at what the Greek says. Many people read this and say, Oh, what typical men. The mother in law is sick in bed. Jesus comes in and heals her and what does she do. She gets up and makes them dinner. Now there are a couple of problems with them. First of all it is the Sabbath. They have just come from the synagogue so the likelihood is that the meal was already laid out since preparing the food would have been work. Secondly and the more important point is the word that Mark uses.

The word for serve is *διακονεο* (diakoneo), the word from which we take deacon. A deacon is a person who serves the church. Peter's mother in law gets up and serves them as in becoming a disciple. Later we will read that she accompanies Jesus along with her son in law Peter and the other three Andrew, James and John who are now followers of Jesus. While un-named she is probably the first of many female disciples. She is healed and begins to help the mission.

I was pondering all of this as I was sitting waiting for a blood test prior to getting my physical in a few weeks. I do try to follow the advice of my doctor and keep ahead of things. I knew when I moved here that I wanted to establish a relationship with a good physician so that if and when the time comes that I truly need the doctor I will have all my records in place and at least have a small relationship built up with my doctor.

So why I found myself wondering why do so many people wait to develop a relationship with God until there is some emergency or great need? Equally valid is why do we wait until a simple problem becomes a major crisis? There may be better parallels here than are first apparent. We are talking about our health in both cases, one is physical the other is spiritual.

Many people put off seeing the doctor because they are afraid of what they will hear. Lose weight, eat less, drink less, eat more vegetables, exercise more, we can all put together a litany of what we do not want to hear. We all know we need to do these things, but somehow we think putting off that appointment means we can put off doing those things our body needs to be healthy.

So too are many of us all too ready to put off attending to our spiritual health. On the surface we seem fine, yet many of us share a doubt that maybe we should take better care of our souls as well as of our bodies. Maybe a visit to a good spiritual director while healthy can prevent us falling into spiritual disease. Maybe entering into a relationship with God on a regular basis in good times rather than waiting for bad times would give us reserves when the bad times do hit.

There is an old story about a man who lived in a house near a river. It was spring and there were flood warnings out. First the sheriff came by in his pickup and offered him a ride to safety. The man said, "No I'll just wait here. I know the Lord will protect me." Then the waters began to rise. The man found himself in a second story window where the sheriff again came by. "Do you want to get in the boat?" the sheriff yelled. "No that's ok I know that God will protect me." Finally the man is standing on his roof and the sheriff comes by one more time in a helicopter. "Well do you want to get in?" One last time he answered, "No, I know that God will protect me." Finally he drowned and when he got to heaven he confronted God and said, "You promised to protect me and yet I still drowned in the flood." Yes I did promise to protect you,' God replied. "And I sent the sheriff three times, once in the truck, once in a boat and finally in a helicopter." "So why didn't you get in?"

The moral of that story is not just will we respond to God, but will we have the sense to know when God is talking. A key is in learning to hear God's voice and respond earlier rather than later. This is what I was talking about when I suggested that we build our relationship with God and Christ in good times rather than waiting for a disaster.

However, human nature being what it is we all tend to wait until the crisis and we end up in the spiritual ER (often located my office) facing some sort of spiritual crisis. These are often related to a physical crisis since the health of the body and soul are so closely linked.

These are times that one feels as if God has taken a 2x4 to the side of one's head as if to say, "Now that I have your attention, will you please listen and respond." Having experienced that spiritual 2x4 several times myself, I can tell you that this is a time to listen and then comes the all important response.

Sometimes that spiritual 2x4 feels a lot like our Isaiah passage today.

Have you not known? Have you not heard?

Has it not been told you from the beginning?

Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

The answer for most of us is yes we have been told, but no we do not know, have not heard and do not understand. Hence we find ourselves in a spiritual crisis. Welcome to human nature.

Some will respond to the crisis with renewed faith and make promises. There are more than a few of us sitting here today after making a promise to God to be more

faithful if God will just help us through the crisis. Like many resolves however as the crisis fades, so does the resolve.

The difference between this type of response and the response of Peter's mother in law and the disciples is that the response is based not on obligation, but on love. If we try to be more faithful or spread the gospel out of a sense of obligation, as something we owe God in repayment for his love, then we will fail. Only in responding out of and to God's love will we grow in faith.

Look at how Jesus works with people he heals. He reaches down and touches them, heals them and then in almost every case sends them on their way. In fact in Mark he usually tells them not to tell anybody about what he has done. This is the way God works with us and we call this grace. Grace is blessings from God that we cannot earn by our actions. Grace is a free gift of God, unearned and undeserved. However we do have a choice of how and when to respond. God's grace is constantly present for us, not just in those times of crisis. We do not have to wait until a crisis to respond to God.

We are approaching one of those times in our liturgical world when we have a golden opportunity to spend some time with God and do a well patient visit if you will. Make plans now to spend some time with God this Lent. Join us on Sunday nights for one of the two programs that we will offer. Set aside Saturday March 14 for our Lenten Quiet Day. Pick up the daily devotional material that I ordered from the Episcopal Church and incorporate that into your daily prayers. Start a daily prayer routine if you do not have one. Use the simple daily devotionals for individuals and families in the prayer book. I'll have copies of this ready the last Sunday in Lent. Do any of these because you want to respond to God out of love, not out of duty or obligation.

To close, take a brief look at Eucharistic prayer C which we will use today for our prayer of consecration. "Open our eyes to see your hand at work in the world about us. Deliver us from the presumption of coming to this Table for solace only, and not for strength; for pardon only, and not for renewal.

Allow Jesus to touch you, to heal you and then get up and serve him.