

EPIPHANY FIVE, YEAR C, FEBRUARY 6, 2022

We all have routines or patterns that shape our lives. How you make your coffee in the morning or what you have for breakfast are part of many people's routines. We don't think of them consciously they're just the way we do things. They become our comfort zones and rarely do we question them or change them. I remember my mother had specific breakfasts that she would make for each day of the week. If she made pancakes it had to be Wednesday. God forbid if she decided to change it up because it threw you off balance and you didn't know what day of the week it was. These routines become our own little truths and no one can convince us of anything else.

At my former parish in Denville, they used to hold a monthly luncheon that was open to the community. One time a gentleman wanted to give an extra donation so he handed one of the women a check written out to Denville Methodist Church. The woman, Liz, politely told him this was the Episcopal church. He argued that he knew this was the Methodist church. Liz again said no it's the Episcopal church. He told her he had been coming to the luncheon for years and knew this was a Methodist church. Liz very firmly and politely told him she'd been a member since the church began and it's always been an Episcopal church. He was so convinced that he was right, it was difficult for him to hear anything different. They were literally at an impasse until several friends finally convinced him it was an Episcopal church and told him to look out the window at the church sign. The disciples and we are not very different from that man.

Fishing was a routine or a pattern for Peter, James, and John. They had grown up around it. It was the way they made a living; and, so it became the way they lived. The routines of sailing, casting, bringing in the catch, cleaning the fish, getting them sold, caring for their equipment were all a habitual pattern of living.

The danger of routines is that they can become prisons for us. We can get so comfortable in our comfort zones that we dare not venture out of them. How quickly we begin to react to new challenges with "I can't do that."

Did you know, on maps that predated Columbus there were words written just west of Gibraltar, that said, "Nothing beyond here," or a sea monster was drawn in to show the fear of the unknown. Sometimes we do the same thing with the patterns we live with and believe them to be the only possibility, or the only truth and our world is set by them. The problem is when that happens, we don't allow for other ideas, other concepts that can push us, even make us uncomfortable to see things in a different light.

As Jesus approached the disciples-to-be, he challenged them with a call that was to break the routine, to see beyond their little self-constructed patterns and to try again. Their routine said, "We've done what we always do and our nets are empty." Think of the excuses the disciples might have used: "I'm too tired; after all, I've been up all night trying to catch something." or "Nothing seems to be working today. Maybe some other day." or "What do you know about fishing? I'm the one who makes his living this way." But to their credit they did have the courage to try again.

Someone once wrote, "Success is failure that tried one more time." And try one more time they did. And they had unbelievable success. This is not to say that we will always have success, but it means new possibilities open up when we are freed from the prisons our routines have established. Listen to our own excuses that become barriers to taking action: "I don't have the time; I'm too old; that's out of my comfort zone; Been there,

done that and I have the T-shirt to proof it; or I don't know how and I'm too old to learn." You can add to the list, but whatever the reason, the danger is these excuses imprison us from taking the steps that will open up new possibilities. We are so convinced that our way of doing something or thinking is right that we become deaf to any other ideas and possibilities.

There was a cartoon in the New Yorker magazine once with the following caption: "This morning opportunity knocked at my door, but by the time I pushed back the bolt, turned the two locks, unlatched the chain, and shut off the alarm system it was gone." What we are talking about is the danger of bunker mentality. We all get that way. It's our way or the highway. I'm right, you're wrong. The disciples had to be open to the suggestions Jesus made to try again as difficult as it was to accept. They had to be willing to listen to another opinion that was contrary to what they thought in order to hear the call to go and fish for people.

Sir Frances Drake wrote a prayer many centuries ago that says: Disturb us Lord when we are too well pleased with ourselves. When our dreams have come true because we dreamed too little. When we arrived safely because we sailed too close to shore.

The power of Jesus' call to the disciples broke the patterns by which they lived. They were being challenged to set aside everything they knew to be true to sail further from the familiar shore, to cast a greater vision, to find new challenges.

There are those times in all of our lives, as with Peter, John, and James, that we need to move on to open our minds to face the challenges that disturb and disrupt our long held beliefs and see what else is beyond our own little world. What we need to do is carry with us what we have learned in our old routines and apply them in new ways. We have had to do this during this pandemic. We have had to learn new things and to do church in a new way. The problem is believing once the pandemic is behind us we can go back doing church the way we've always done it. This pandemic has changed all of us and all the institutions we hold dear – especially the church. How will we live into being a living, breathing, relatable church preaching the gospel that is for everyone, not just a select few, by continuing doing our old routines and patterns?

In the Gospel the disciples sailed on without knowing at all what lay ahead. Faith gave them the courage to forge ahead. The same is true for us. We cannot realize the potential of opportunities until we have pursued them.

Elie Wiesel once said, "It is a great privilege to be defeated by God." When Jesus pushed the disciples to try something different and new, it brought a whole new way of life to them. For this is what God does in our lives. Our faith becomes the prism through which we see the potential of our lives. Through this faith we find new ways to use the skills that we have developed in life. We see new opportunities around us. When all our fears and excuses get crushed, we are finally open to the power of God to lead us. Peter, John, and James left their fishing nets behind them; they left everything--their routines, their comfort zones, their ways of making a living and marched off into history to find a new life. They saw the world as a new challenge through the prism of God's love and in turn saw others in a new light.

It is not that their lives became charmed. It was anything but easy. There would be plenty of moments of uncertainty. Moments when they questioned their decision and when they didn't understand what Jesus was trying to tell them. But this first step, the willingness to hear something different and the call to do something different had been

taken. And though there would be twists and turns in the road, they were to become the Church.

God is still confronting us, challenging the patterns we have fallen into--the habits and ways of thinking that have at times imprisoned us. God confronts us with what might be and God simply calls for us to be open. Just as the disciples were open to the challenge to follow, God offers us to see the possibilities ahead of us. The question is are we willing to try and do we have the courage to take those first steps? Amen.