

February 6, 2022  
The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C  
The Rev. Keri T. Aubert  
St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, New Haven, CT

Isaiah 6:1-8, [9-13]  
Psalm 138  
1 Corinthians 15:1-11  
Luke 5:1-11

Today's readings include two of what we call "call stories." More specifically, we heard God calling Isaiah and Jesus calling Peter. These two stories have some similarities. Both Isaiah and Peter, in this order: witness a miraculous manifestation of divine glory; express feelings of unworthiness; get a direct message that they are chosen nonetheless; and then accept the call to act.

You might notice something more about the sequence of events. Isaiah/Peter assent *before* they know what God/Jesus might be expecting or how difficult those expectations will be; they say "Yes" before they know what they're getting into. Let's think about that in relation to their previously expressed feelings of unworthiness. People who carry deep-seated feelings of unworthiness can be vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation. Thinking of this made me wonder whether God/Jesus looked for vulnerable people exactly for the possibility of taking advantage of them. I wondered, but I really don't think that's how God/Jesus works.

I think it's more likely that *every* person carries feelings of unworthiness, even if most of us work hard to hide them. Those feelings do make us vulnerable to forces both external and internal that have the power to limit our experience of abundant life. The contrasting Good News is that every person, including every one, of us is in fact intrinsically *worthy*. Miraculous manifestations of divine glory are all around us, set out for every one of us to see. They might not be quite as stellar as our scriptural reporting, but sometimes they come close. Through them God continually reminds us of our intrinsic worthiness. Sometimes this truth strikes us so deeply that we are broken open, and we respond by changing our lives.

The collect of the day we heard at the beginning of worship says this: "Set us free, O God, from the bondage of our sins, and give us the liberty of that abundant life which you have made known to us in your Son our Savior Jesus Christ ..." Hear in this the juxtaposition of "bondage of sins" to "liberty of abundant life." I'll offer here two reminders about language, reminders might be helpful not only for today's lessons but also more generally as we edge away from the Epiphany and toward Ash Wednesday. First, the Greek word translated as *sin* translates more literally as *to miss the mark*, as in archery. Second, the Greek word translated as *repent* translates more literally as *to turn*, as toward God. God has bestowed upon every person a worthiness that is irrevocable. Sometimes *missing the mark* is simply being out of touch with one's own worthiness. Sometimes *turning* is simply seeking reassurance of that worthiness.

For some people, worthiness means simply feeling able to take a nap. I recently started receiving social media missives from an organization called The Nap Ministry, which "examines the liberating power of naps."<sup>1</sup> The Nap Ministry website says this: We believe rest is a form of resistance and name sleep deprivation as a racial and social justice issue."<sup>2</sup>

The founder of The Nap Ministry is a seminary-trained artist/activist/theologian named Tricia Hersey. She's also a Black woman, and that is important in understanding where she's coming from. In an interview in *The Atlantic* that happened to come out very early in the pandemic, Hersey said this:

There's a stigma around caring for yourself. Unless it's attached to capitalism, then it's okay. You can pay \$200 for a facial, and then you're taking care of yourself. But if you're caring for yourself with something as deep as sleep, which is one of our most ancient and primal needs, if you're doing that in public, caring for your body, that's shameful. I tie that back to capitalism and to white supremacy and these notions around not seeing humans as divine and not seeing our bodies as belonging to us. When you start to deprogram around all the systems that have us at this point of sleep deprivation, where we don't think we are worthy of sleep.<sup>3</sup>

The Nap Ministry was founded in 2016, but it seems to have taken off during the pandemic, which has led us to question a lot of prior assumptions. You're probably seen stories in the media about the so-called Great Resignation that is currently underway. Some news outlets more humorously refer to it as the Big Quit. In short, record numbers of employees are leaving their jobs. Of course this is related to the pandemic, but the shift is not just among healthcare or other frontline workers. I'm hearing about parents who want more flexibility for their children; about commuters who want to retain the extra time they gained by working from home; about low-wage workers who have a sliver more power in the labor marketplace; and many, many more. Folks aren't necessarily leaving the workplace entirely. A recent article from NPR's *Planet Money* had this title: "The Great Resignation? More like The Great Renegotiation."<sup>4</sup> In short, workers have become impatient with the toll of the contemporary workplace, and many are able to take advantage of the ongoing pandemic disruption to make changes for the better. It's often not about doing the same thing for more money. People are making bigger changes, because they know their lives are worth more.

One of the refrains that I have been seeing over and over again during the pandemic is a line from Mary Oliver's poem "The Summer Day." That line is this: Tell me, what is it you plan to do / with your one wild and precious life?" The nice thing about being back on Zoom is that I can use multimedia in my sermons again, so I want to take advantage of that today. I'm going to play a video that includes the voice of Mary Oliver herself reading "The Summer Day." It's set to animation.

*PLAY VIDEO: Mary Oliver reading "The Summer Day"*<sup>5</sup>

There's an interfaith initiative called the Clergy Letter Project that describes itself as "an endeavor designed to demonstrate that religion and science can be compatible and to elevate the quality of the debate of this issue." The Clergy Letter Project is recognizing next Sunday as what it calls Evolution Sunday. Next Sunday we'll be distracted with Annual Meeting. But Evolution Sunday fits in for a mention today, because, for me, God is made manifest through science. One of the books I picked up during my sabbatical is this one: *Eating the Sun: Small Musings on a Vast Universe* by Ella Frances Sanders. It's a series of short essays about amazing scientific facts, presented with quirky related art. Here's one fact that she mentions: the number of atoms that composes your body is something like 7 billion billion billion.<sup>6</sup> *Your* body contains approximately 7 billion billion billion atoms. I think that's a miracle. I'm going to read a little bit of this book related to the subject of atoms. Here's what she writes in the section titled "I Am Made From Carbon":

You are made from the remnants of stars.

Strung up like fairy lights, unobtrusive, at once quaint and overwhelming in a way only the impossible can be, the stars are to thank for your singular fragile body.

When stars die, they take the equivalent of one last deep breath and then fall in on themselves, like a soufflé that has been coked for slightly too long. When this happens, they throw off their outer layers, releasing their contents to the magnificent nothingness and absolute everything that is the universe. Each year 40,000 tons of this starry dust falls to Earth; it contains the elements that will be used ceaselessly, throughout every living thing, around the entire planet.

Your body is composed of the products of such cosmic events, those remnants of burning giants. ...<sup>7</sup>

Over the last two years, our lives have changed, and that change is still coming. But know this: God is still with us. As much as you can in the midst of so much challenge, cultivate the means by which *you* see the manifestation of divine glory, so that you may know that you are worthy. Remember: God is speaking to *you*; Jesus is leading *you* toward abundant life.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Nap Ministry, from the “About” page of its website, available online at <https://thenapministry.wordpress.com/about/> (accessed February 6, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> “Listen: You are Worthy of Sleep, Even in a Pandemic,” a transcription of a podcast interview of Tricia Hersey by James Hamblin and Katherine Wells, *The Atlantic*, April 30, 2020, available online at <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/04/you-are-worthy-of-sleep/610996/> (accessed February 6, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Greg Rosalsky, “The Great Resignation? More like The Great Renegotiation,” *National Public Radio*, January 25, 2022, available at <https://www.npr.org/sections/money/2022/01/25/1075115539/the-great-resignation-more-like-the-great-renegotiation> (accessed February 6, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y, posted on their YouTube site, available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBPHUE961zI> (accessed February 6, 2022). The full text of the poem is as follows:

Who made the world?  
Who made the swan, and the black bear?  
Who made the grasshopper?  
This grasshopper, I mean—  
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,  
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,  
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down—  
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.  
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.  
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.  
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.  
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down  
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,  
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,  
which is what I have been doing all day.  
Tell me, what else should I have done?  
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?  
Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
with your one wild and precious life?<sup>5</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Ella Frances Sanders, *Eating the Sun: Small Musings on a Vast Universe* (New York: Penguin Books, 2019), 67.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 1.