

Pray With Me: May the Words of my Mouth and the Meditations of all our Hearts Be Acceptable in your Sight, O Lord, My Strength and My Redeemer. Amen.

"Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

So much is packed into this one exclamation. It is a moment of radical change in the life of Simon, who is Peter. A shout in a moment of meeting with God. A call of Revelation, as Simon calls Christ Lord. A call of Confession, as Simon names his sins. A call overwhelmed by shame, as Simon pushes away the teacher he has identified as holy. What a profound encapsulation of what can happen when we encounter God. But, what is even more interesting to me is how Jesus responds to this crying out on the part of Simon Peter.

“Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.”

Jesus sees what Simon Peter is experiencing and expressing. He sees the fear and shame for what it is. He sees that Simon has seen him for who he is. Jesus could agree with Simon; he could go away from him and leave him where he is, but Jesus does not cling to the confession or the shame, he holds onto the Revelation. He comforts, and he calls.

Please hear me; the confession is essential. In the face of God, so perfect and abounding in goodness, a human response like Simon Peter's is a necessary and poignant part of the process of coming to know Jesus Christ. It is important to recognize our distance from what is good and holy as it calls us into the important work of reconciliation and repentance,

AND

Jesus does not keep the focus there because Christ's transforming power is not a work of shame but one of purpose. Jesus does not leave us when we pull away, just as this scene does not end with Simon Peter's confession. Christ turns him, as he turns us, towards purpose instead. Shame pulls away; purpose steps up to the plate. Shame disconnects;

purpose reminds us of our interconnectedness. Shame is the enemy's work; Purpose is the work of the Creator.

No matter how we view the situations that surround us here in Alexandria and around this country, we are experiencing a level of chaos that has called many of us to turn to God and to pray intercessory prayers, that is, prayers on behalf of other people, including people we are diametrically opposed to. Many of us are praying today for the possibility of hardened hearts to be transformed by God - and I believe these prayers are powerful when we allow ourselves to fully believe that God can actually do what we are asking for.

As the Psalmist says, “Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways so that sinners will turn back to you.”

God restores us and calls us into something deeper. We speak, myself included, often with flippant tones and an air of disbelief around the

possibility of a transformation of the heart, especially hearts we feel are especially hardened - when it is a fundamental biblical, historical reality. If we haven't recognized it in our own lives or the lives closest to us, We see it throughout the Bible: when David repents of the harm he's caused to God and Bathsheba, in the conversions of Nicodemus the tax collector, and Saul the persecutor of the earliest Christians, and we will even see it again in this Simon Peter who goes from denying Jesus three times before the crucifixion to leading the Church of God in its infancy. We've seen it in more recent church history: when Oscar Romero became a Bishop late in his life (and ministry) and was confronted with the violence and mistreatment of those around him, especially the plight of the poor, his heart and his ministry were profoundly and radically changed forever, which changed the history of Western Christendom and the Church in El Salvador forever as well. These examples remind us that as Christians, we are members of a faith that believes it is possible for radical change to come. Still, we must begin by imagining that it can happen and is happening in ourselves, as it did for Simon Peter in his

boat. It begins with prayer, a prayer of hope and a prayer of lament. A prayer that knows that the way we are now, the way the world is now, will not prevail. We can sing with the Psalmist today when they sing that, “All the kings of the earth will praise you, O Lord, when they have heard the words of your mouth” because we know that the God who made us is working in the heart of every person who allows themselves to be moved, all it takes is a moment of willingness. We can speak of hope, even now, even here, even when we feel surrounded by brokenness, because the way that we are now, the way that the world is now, is not the way that we will be if God gets the final say. And God will have the final say. Amen.