Isaiah 6.1-13; 1 Corinthians 15.1-11, Luke 5.1-11

As I read and listened to the lectionary Texts for this week I found myself amazed, once again, at the dynamic power and inspiration of our Scriptures. I am in awe at the way these Passages interact with, speak to, and reflect each other. The Wind of God that blew as these words were first spoken, continued to blow as the words were repeated over generations and millennia, as they were written down, copied, and re-copied. God's Breath breathed through these words even when scribes were making "mistakes," even when translators inserted their own theologies into translations. And I have felt God's Wind blowing through these words during the past weeks, stirring and swirling, blowing off accumulated dust and debris, exposing beauty and grace and Life. The Wind of God blows through our sacred Text, breathing life into these ancient Words, breathing Life into us. Healing us. Saving us.

In today's Texts, Isaiah, Paul, and Peter have each been blown about by the Wind of God. Each has an encounter with the Living God, the Living Christ. Isaiah's encounter happens in worship. In Corinthians, Paul's encounter is being remembered, and in Luke, Simon Peter's encounter happens at his place of work. When these three gave themselves to the Living One, the direction and course of their lives turned. When we encounter and engage the Living One, we too are stirred and swirled. The Wind of God blows, and when we let ourselves be blown, our lives will be turned, and continue to turn.

Now if you're like me you may be thinking, "I know that." My initial response, which is a kind of default for many of us, maybe even all of us, is, "I knew that already. Give me a new insight." But that default response keeps us from hearing with our ears and seeing with our eyes and understanding with our minds. When we already know, God's Wind blows but we don't hear or see or understand it. Isaiah and Paul and Peter already

knew. When Paul was pursuing and persecuting Christians, he did so with conviction, knowing that what he was doing was the right thing to do. And Simon Peter was a fisherman by trade; he knew the best and the right ways to catch fish. You can hear his impatience and his insult, Master, we have worked all night long. But if you say so Jesus, we'll let down our nets. And we can hear him muttering under his breath, Who does he think he is telling me how to fish? We know he's muttering because we're all too familiar with our own muttering.

Whether to prove Jesus wrong or whether too tired to argue with him, Peter puts the nets back into the water. And he finds out he's wrong; he didn't know. They caught fish, so many fish that their boats nearly sank. You can see Peter and James and John standing in amazement and fear, overwhelmed at the catch and afraid for their lives. What they knew about being fishermen had lost its certainty. The security they knew and expected in their boats was also lost. Their disorientation and fear and awe emptied them of what they had known and were certain of. In their awe and fear, in their disorientation we hear reflections of God's response to Isaiah. When Isaiah asks God, How long will the people keep listening but not comprehending? How long will they keep looking but not seeing?" God answers, Until cities lie waste…and vast is the emptiness in the land. Even if a tenth part remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump.

The holy seed is its stump, is God's answer to Isaiah. Peter's world had suddenly been felled. His knowing, his certainty had been felled like an oak. And he was left standing in that boat, a stump, exposed and vulnerable. And it is there, in that most exposed and vulnerable place, in that vast emptiness, it is there that Peter's holy seed sprouts. It is there that the Wind of God blows, breathing Living Breath, stirring new life into lifeless nets and

lifeless living. And Peter eyes that have been shut are now open and he recognizes the Living God. We know he sees the Living God by his response, I am a sinful man.

"I am a sinful man" is not a confession of moral failure, not a confession of the unworthiness or worm-ness of his humanity. "I am a sinful woman" is a confession of our humanity in the face of the Living God. The Living God is Other, is Mystery, is Holy. It is hard to stand—in our vulnerability, in our vast emptiness—it is hard to stand as the stump of a felled tree before the Otherness and Mystery and Holiness of God. But until and unless we do, our eyes will remain shut, our ears dull, our minds closed. It is how the paradox, the upside-down-ness of the Kingdom of God saves and heals and makes us whole.

Isaiah had a similar response when the Living God blew on him and caught his attention. "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips." Isaiah's lost-ness and unclean lips are, like Peter's confession, a recognition of his humanity before the Holy, Living God. Paul too has a confession, a confession unlike Isaiah's and Peter's. In our Corinthians Passage, Paul is naming the appearances of the Living Christ beginning with Cephas then the twelve then the 500, then to James and to the apostles. Paul is the last person on his list, his confession is that he is the "least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle." That sounds like Isaiah and Peter. Even so, the Living Christ makes an appearance to Paul. The Living Christ encounters Paul.

But Paul's confession continues with a most interesting recognition, "By the grace of God I am what I am." *I am what I am. By the grace of God I am what I am.* I am not more than I am. I am not less than I am. Paul's confession acknowledges who he is before the Living Christ, recognizes who he is in his community and in the community of saints. He is the least. And. And God's grace is with him. God's grace has not been, is not, and will not be

empty. I am what I am, says Paul. In this confession there is no room for self-promotion or ego preservation. Nor is there room for self-contempt or self-criticism. There is only the truth and the honesty of who and what Paul is created to be before his Creator. His knowing and his ego have been felled, the holy seed has sprouted, given new life by the Living Christ: I am what I am.

When I was working at the coop, I became friends with one of my employees. Good friends. Life happened and our relationship broke. I felt exposed, vulnerable, like a felled oak. The break in the relationship caused me to question nearly everything I knew about myself, about how and who I understood myself to be. The Wind of God was blowing and God's grace was not empty. Even in the broken relationship, I respected this former friend. So when I'd learn that she'd done this or that, I'd find myself upset, Why would she do that? But ever so slowly my eyes saw and my mind understood that she did what she did because she was who she was. And the Wind of God kept blowing through my dulled mind and I began to see and hear something new: in the same way that she was who she was, so I was who I was. I'd spent so much of my life trying in excise the parts of me that I didn't like, expecting that if I worked hard enough and tried hard enough, I could get rid of my weaknesses and limitations. Blind and deaf and dull of mind, I was unconsciously trying to be flawless, to reach some impossible standard of perfection, trying to save and heal myself, trying to be God. But as sight and hearing were restored, I began to see, to hear, to understand, and to say with Paul, I am who I am.

God's grace was not empty. In time as I emptied myself of unconscious and unrealistic expectations, as I gave myself to encounters with the Living Christ, I began to find room for God's grace. To experience God's grace. The holy seed buried in the stump

began to sprout as the Wind of God blew, as the Breath of the Living God breathed Life. The relationship was healed and we continue to have a friendship we deeply cherish.

With Isaiah and Peter, and with Moses and the Virgin Mary, we know that the only response when we are encountered by the Living God is to stand in awe and to confess, I am a human being. I am unclean. I am sinful. I am not God. And with Isaiah and Peter, with Moses and Paul and Mary, our confession doesn't end there. When Moses encountered the Wind of God burning in the bush, blowing and burning but now consuming, Moses asks, What is Your name? And God answers, I am who I am. Mary recognizes the I Am, recognizes the Living Christ in her impossible pregnancy. Peter, standing in his boat with an impossible catch of fish, recognizes the I Am in Jesus, recognizes the Living Christ. And Paul recognizes the Living Christ, recognizes the Resurrected Christ.

We are not God. We will never be God. That is Good News! And Paul proclaims more Good News: that the Resurrected Christ, that the Living Christ appears to all of us, in all times. The Living Christ lives and breathes and blows in all places, in all times. We know from the life of Jesus that the Living Christ opens blind eyes, opens deaf ears, opens closed minds and hearts. The Living Christ touches us, breathes in us, blows on us, saving, healing, rescuing, turning us from unconscious, lifeless living to grace-filled, joy-filled living.

By the grace of God, with the Living Christ, with Paul we confess, I am who I am. This is a present tense confession. Because we are human, our ears will always be at least a little deaf, our sight will always have some blind spots, our minds always be dull in some places. There is always be more dust and debris to be blown away. There will always be more beauty and grace to expose. But now, in *this* moment, we know the healing and saving and liberation of the Living Christ. In *this* moment, I am who I am. We are who we are.