

Fifth Sunday of the Year – February 7, 2016

Baseball legend Yogi Berra died on September 22, 2015, at age 90. During his 19 years with the New York Yankees, Yogi was famous for his forays into muddled grammar and creative wordplay. For example, when asked by his wife if he wanted to be buried in New York or in his hometown of St. Louis, he said, “I don’t know, surprise me.”

More to the point of today’s Scripture readings is one of Yogi’s most famous lines: “When you come to a fork in the road, take it.” Our three principal figures in today’s Scriptures had settled into their lives. They didn’t expect to come upon a fork in the road. Isaiah was a temple priest in the king’s service with an established routine. Paul was a superbly educated Jewish zealot, who made it his job to persecute the church of God. Peter was an experienced fisherman who did well enough to care for his family and his workers. Despite their personal shortcomings (“I am a man with unclean lips,” says Isaiah; “I am the least of the apostles not fit to be called an apostle,” says Paul; and, “depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man,” says Peter), despite being afraid to take the fork in the road offered them, despite feeling small and unequal to the task put right in their faces, they gulp down their hesitancy and their reluctance and give themselves over to God’s creative initiative. Not theirs were the more common refrains: “That’s not my job...” or “It’s not on my agenda...” or “That’s above my pay grade.”

No, it’s words like these: “Here I am, send me;” or “By the grace of God I am what I am and his grace has not been ineffective,” or “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will be catching people, not just fish.”

Make no mistake, our three principal figures in today’s Scriptures are large figures; they’ve all had dramatic encounters and experiences of the divine; they’ve each been called by God in technicolored ways. Good for the! But what about us? We’re smaller, not given to vision of the divine, not seemingly called in any large and famously dramatic ways.

And yet here we are. Our words, our witness are compelling too. Why? Because we are loved into being by God’s mercy; we are equipped for life in Christ right from our baptism; we are sustained for the long haul in the merciful hands of our God.

As Yogi said: “It’s déjà vu all over again.” So when the Lord says “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?” Maybe we will be ever more and more willing to say with Isaiah, “Here I am; send me!”