

February 7, 2010
Scarboro United Church
Calgary AB
J. Paul Mullen

Read: Isaiah 6:1-13, Luke 5:1-11

“Engaging Deep Productivity”

Dave McGinn, writing in the Globe and Mail, Saturday, Jan. 23, writes of a trend to use younger and younger bloggers as touchstones for the fashion world. After mentioning several fashion and food critics in their mid to late teens he writes, “Of all the teens and tweens who are blogging their way to fame, however, few have reached the heights of Tavi Gevinson, who began her fashion blog, Style Rookie, in March of 2008 at the ripe old age of 11. . . .”

He quotes Hal Niedzveicki, author and cultural critic, “It’s an obvious reflection and end point of a culture that is not particularly complicated, that rarely looks at things with a long-term perspective or tries to get to the root of an issue, that is very much infantile.”

McGinn concludes, “our idea of expertise has undergone a massive change in the Internet era. Until recently, an expert was someone who had spent a few years undergoing training in a field and then even more time sharpening his or her critical skills. Now, though, wisdom and experience appear to have been supplanted by a thirst for novelty and newness.”

A week and a half ago Jeanne and I and our two daughters and their families began six days and seven nights in the Dominican Republic, much of which was spent on or near white sandy beaches, often under cocoanut palms, and frequently in or on the surface of the water.

We also took part in a snorkeling expedition to have a look at some nearby coral reefs, my first chance to have a live, first hand look at what lies beneath. Although I didn’t see anything I hadn’t seen on TV, I found that breathing through a tube, swimming and trying to take as many pictures as possible, deepened my perception of that reality.

I hope more sailing, snorkeling and possibly scuba diving will be in my future. I have a real attraction to and fondness for surfacey things, being a product of the TV generation, but I have also learned that when you get in and below the surface there is so much more.

I suspect Isaiah was a surfacey kind of guy. He had status and probably

called by God into ministry, the message and the process of delivering it are something to which you don't agree to, you submit to. You are not signing on for the glory! [On reflection perhaps a better word than submit would be surrender]

When people find out I am a Minister I get one of two responses – actually three, as the first is to re-wind everything they have said and apologize for any swearing they did or might have done. One other response is a big smile and a comment like “O, it must be wonderful to be doing the Lord's work.” I have heard this most often at weddings and baptisms.

The other response usually comes in the process of preparing for a funeral or, strangely, when I tell people our Annual Meeting is coming up. They shake their heads in a somewhat sympathetic way and say something like, “I wouldn't have your job for all the money in the world.”

My best response I stole from a Catholic Nun who cared for the dying, “Neither would I.”

Willing or not, a call is something you submit to, it's not about the money. Although you have longer to fulfill your call if you can eat and have shelter! It is not about the glory.

It's also not about productivity – money, converts or otherwise. I doubt that Isaiah filled many synagogues with his message of immanent destruction and the need for a complete about face in peoples' and the nation's value system. No more exploiting the poor, no more unjust trade practices, no more worshipping the gods of success, power and status. Turn back to the one true God and find a deeper productivity. Not an abundance of money, status and/or power, but an abundance of healthy relationships, profound spirituality – where the glory of God fills the temple of your life and all life.

Adam and Eve were the wealthiest people in the world until they decided they wanted more apples. (Actually they were the only people in the world but that is beside the point!)

Simon Peter, James and John were Jewish fishers who had had their livelihood destroyed by King Herod. Herod wanted to curry favour with the Roman Emperor. He built a large commercial fishery on the shores of Lake Gennesaret, also called the Sea of Galilee, and named it Tiberius, after the emperor, Tiberius Caesar Augustus. While this assured a steady food supply for the hungry hoards of Rome, it devastated the local fishery. It is no wonder that a night's work, hoping to find fresh fish for the morning market, yielded nothing.

When they follow the Carpenter's direction (a carpenter, for crying out loud!) and go out in deeper water and cast their nets into the deep, they are blown away by the huge quantity of fish they harvest. They find abundance – but

Although I had been aware of a call from God since my childhood it was only confirmed when I sat down in faith and faced my fear of my own emptiness, a fear that had kept me very much on the surface of life. When I cast the net of my awareness on my emptiness and allowed myself to experience the empty depths I feared, I literally felt that emptiness being filled from the bottom up to the top and overflowing. I knew then that I was ready to submit to the call.

Even though that submission has meant profound and sometimes painful difficulties, each week I get to stand up here and look on the beautiful faces of God's abundance and walk a ways with you on your journey in faith.

This week try to find 15 or 20 minutes of quiet and, trusting God is with you, with each breath you take, say in your mind, "God, I am empty." Trust God to be with you in whatever follows.

We are fishing for people, folks, and we have a Carpenter who shows deep productivity by getting in the same troubled boat and urging us beyond the familiar into deep waters.

Thanks be to God. Amen