

Isaiah 6:1-13, Luke 5:1-11 and 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Today's scripture readings have themes running through them which doesn't always happen... we see the magnificence and glory of God, and we also hear about people who feel unworthy being called by God and responding yes, and we can too..

Let's start by looking at the call of Isaiah we heard in this morning's reading from Isaiah 6. We don't know if Isaiah was a prophet prior to this call, and it is just a reinforcement of his prophetic call with an impending message from God, or if this is his first call to be a prophet. We do know that Isaiah was a priest serving in the Jerusalem temple, where he was when he had the vision recorded in today's reading.

What we do see in this God inspired vision is the greatness and glory of God. Think about it, in this huge temple it is only the hem of the robe that is filling the space in Isaiah's vision. There are seraphs, members of the heavenly court surrounding God, proclaiming the holiness of God by calling to one another. They are calling "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." We sing a form of this greeting every Sunday during the preface to Holy Communion. It begins, "Holy, holy, holy Lord God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory." Have you ever taken time to consider the meaning of this, or is it so rote that you just sing it out of habit? I want us to really consider the greatness of God as we sing this today, how holy God is and how his glory covers all creation. Wouldn't it be something if we could sing it so the foundations would shake like the foundations of the temple did for the seraphs in the Jerusalem temple?

Isaiah realized he is in the presence of God, and no one can stand in the presence of God without some sort of protection. That is another job of the seraphs, they are protecting him from death. Isaiah realizes that he is totally unfit to be there in God's presence, he cried out, "Woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips living in the midst of a people of unclean lips." That's when, if we weren't uncomfortable enough realizing the power and glory of the presence of God, a seraph brings a burning piece of coal and touches Isaiah's lips. Ouch! I can feel the pain! The burning coal removes Isaiah's sin. It is a symbol of grace. The same grace we are given through the death of Jesus. It is filled with pain; it is not a cheap grace.

Now God called out, "Who will go?" to which Isaiah cries, "Send me." If you've followed the book of Isaiah at all you realize this is not an easy life he is giving himself to. Isaiah is ignored and mistreated, all the while remaining faithful to God's calling on his life.

However, the message Isaiah receives from God after accepting the call is even more terrifying than a burning piece of coal being touched to his lips. He is told that because of their disobedience the Hebrew people are going to be in desolation. Long before this the Hebrew people had split into two tribes, the tribe of Israel and the tribe of Judah. The tribe of Israel had already separated from the tribe of Judah and moved north and disappeared. The message God gives Isaiah most likely refers to the Babylonian takeover of the Judean people. It was a time when their livelihood, their possessions, their religion and way of life were stripped from them, and they were carried away as slaves into captivity. That was the message God gave to him to give to the people of the tribe of Judah, but God also gave Isaiah the message that the people of Judah would not listen to what was being prophesized. God described the disregard of the people in such a way that Isaiah cried out, "How long, O Lord?" To which God replied, "If there is a tenth of this culture standing it will be burned again like a stump that remains standing after the tree has been felled." How horrifying to think that God

would tell Isaiah the people would be destroyed. Yet did you hear what God said about the tree stump? Have you ever tried to burn out a tree stump? If you have you probably know that it is nearly impossible, a stump needs to be winched out of the ground for it to be totally gone. God finished by saying, "The holy seed is in the stump."

The holy seed is in the stump. Have you ever seen a green sprout growing out of an old stump? There is new life coming out of what once was. In the same way, God will provide a remnant of the people of Judah. The tribe of Judah is the family from which Jesus descended. We have been given new life through Jesus. Even though we don't deserve to stand in the presence of God, through Jesus we are accepted into the family of God. Some of us answer God's call, not just us pastors, but those of you who listen to what God is asking of you and then respond in the way you understand your purpose.

Simon, who Jesus later names Peter responded to Jesus, even when he didn't think it would make any difference. Here were these fishermen, tired from a night's work in which they accomplished nothing. They must have felt defeated. Then they took the time to listen to Jesus speak before going home to their families and their beds. After speaking to the crowd, Jesus came into their boats and gave them direction. Even though they were exhausted they did what he said. They most likely thought that putting the nets out the other side of the boat wasn't going to give them any results, but Peter did as Jesus instructed. The net filled with so many fish that when the catch was brought aboard the boat began to sink. It was then Peter realized Jesus was not just another rabbi. When he saw the miracle of the catch of fish Peter bowed down saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" Peter knew he was not worthy to stand in the presence of such greatness. Jesus told him not to be afraid because now they would be fishing for people, Peter was accepted into the presence of God, and he had a purpose to fulfill, a mission in life, as did James and John.

Jesus comes to us, even when we feel defeated, unworthy, exhausted from the world, and gives us what we need. Are we willing to do what he asks? Before you answer this too lightly, think a minute what it meant for Isaiah to answer God's call. Think about the disciples' lives. None of them had an easy path, nor did they end well in human terms. But they did what God asked of them and they spread the good news to more people who had no knowledge of Jesus and what he has done for us.

Paul was the last apostle, one who was not with the 12 during Jesus' life on earth, but was chosen by Jesus at the period of time when the apostles were spreading the good news. He had persecuted the Christians and was on his way to Damascus to bring back some he knew had left the city when his donkey bucked him off. Paul went into a trance like state and was before Jesus who asked Paul why he persecuted his people. Paul's entire direction in life changed, and he was a champion for Christ and one who spread the good news even farther by establishing churches. It is from a letter to one of the churches he had established that we heard the reading from 1 Corinthians. Our reading ended with Paul stating, "For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe" Paul listened to the call of God through Jesus, as Isaiah listened to God's call, and the disciples listened to Jesus. Even though they felt unworthy, they followed and obeyed. We too, even though we are not worthy, have been made worthy through Christ. Will we listen, follow, and obey? All glory be to God.