

Sermon: God's Clarion Call

Scripture: Isaiah 6:1-8, Luke 5:1-11

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

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During the time when Israel is divided in two, Isaiah served as a prophet in the southern kingdom, or Judah. Judah has misplaced their trust in surrounding nations rather than God. Finding themselves without a king with death of Uzziah, as a nation they are having internal as well as external conflicts as a nation. As we begin Isaiah 6, we find Isaiah in his own crisis after finding himself in a predicament. Listen now to the Word of the Lord.

Isaiah 6:1-8

¹In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. ²Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. ³And one called to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory."

⁴The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. ⁵And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

⁶Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." ⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

Amen.

Today's gospel message comes from Luke 5:1-11, when Jesus calls his first disciples. While Matthew and Mark simply have Jesus simply calling out to Simon, Andrew, and James to "Follow Me, and I will make you fish for people,"¹ in the gospel of Luke, it includes the details of the miraculous catch. Let us wonder and imagine what took place on the boat as we hear the Word of the Lord from this well-known passage.

Luke 5:1-11

¹Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ² he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." ⁶ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." ¹¹ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

This is the Word of the Lord;

Thanks be to God.

¹ Mark 1:16-20, Matthew 4:18-22

Friends, please join me in a prayer. God of mystery and wonder, as we look into the passage of you calling your servants, may you illuminate your deeper truth and love that comes from you for us this morning, that we will get to know you more intimately, and hear your voice to know that it is coming from you. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing to you, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are – John Wooden.

In today's passage, we meet two Biblical heroes in one of their lowest points in their lives. Prophet Isaiah, known for his prophetic voice, has been told many times about how Israelites needs to repent and turn back to God, or they will face the wrath of God Almighty. When the Bible mentioned that the King Uzziah died, it meant much more for Isaiah than it meets the eye. It meant the years of prosperity has ended and the king was replaced by a child regent; it meant that it was the beginning of the prophecy starting to unfold, the Assyrian Empower was about to reach its peak of dominance and influence as it moves further south, to threaten and eventually to take over the land of Judah. To prophesy God's word as a prophet was one thing; to experience God's ultimatum must been terrifying. As any messenger would have felt as the message fell on deaf ears, Isaiah might thought that he was a failure, that through that guilt he might have prevented all bad thing that were about to happen – loss of their kingdom, loss of their freedom, the exile that is to come, the darkness that is about to hover over the Israelites – wondering through all the what-ifs in his mind tracing back his own steps. As Isaiah could have succumbed to his failures in the midst of economic freefall and lack of security and leadership in the Kingdom of Judah, it is God who shows Godself to Isaiah.

Likewise, in the New Testament, we hear about Simon Peter, who just had a disastrous night not catching any fish. He had nothing to pay his crew, nothing to bring home, nothing to show for his effort. Simon Peter must have hit rock bottom of his fishing career and was pondering himself how he will get above this low point in his life. Like Isaiah, that is when Jesus shows up to the lowest freshwater lake on earth (Lake of Gennesaret or better known as Sea of Galilee) and decides to climb on one of two boats, which belonged to Simon Peter. Jesus, who later shows us that he can walk on the water and commands the seas, the wind, and all of his creation, decides to come into his life, into his boat.

In 2022, most of us, if not all of us, find ourselves in a same boat; we are suffering from the trauma of COVID and experiencing pandemic fatigue. Mixed with safety concerns of our beloved ones, ever changing social policies, and the stress of preparing for the tomorrow's unknowns have taken a toll on our mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual life. But COVID also dug up our deeper worries and concerns of our lives to the surface. Some of us are wondering and are fixated in the past like Isaiah while some of us are deeply concerned

about the next step, not knowing where to go, what to do, or how to move forward. Bible shows us that it is often at these moments, at our lowest, that we find easier to find God in our midst, experiencing God coming to our aid, demonstrating that it is only through God's power and help that we can overcome such times. When God does bless us with God's presence and helps us overcome, and this is today's message and focus for us, there are two ways of responding to God's blessings.

When Isaiah sees the throne of God, he quickly realizes the unworthiness of seeing the Holy God Almighty. What we forget when reading this is that Isaiah is in the presence of God, where we want to eternally belong. As a prophet and messenger of God, is this the exact place where we ultimately want to be? The greatest blessing and grace of God has been endowed upon Isaiah as the seraph has touched Isaiah's lips with the holy fire from the King of King's altar to blot out the sins. No one would have blamed Isaiah to remain in the presence of God. Everything promised in the Bible about heaven would be right there, to feel the absolute pure love that God is. Yet, Isaiah heard God's clarion call. A Loud, urgent, distressed call, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

To Peter, Jesus gave him a blessing that took away all of his worries that he had moments before Jesus climbed onto his boat and entered his life. Jesus filled his boat with fish that would erase his worldly problems for years to come. No one would have blamed Peter if he took the fish and lived out his blessings that God has endowed upon him. But Peter must have heard the God's clarion call, that the word of God that Jesus was preaching to the people at shore was not meant only to be heard, but to be responded to. Peter understood that our responsibility as Christians and followers of Christ is to respond to God's clarion call. When Peter, James and John came to the shore, they didn't cash out the blessing of multitude of fishes, but rather simply left everything and followed Jesus.

This morning, God is asking us, did you hear my clarion call? A loud cry of God that begs for us to respond to God's request to not focus on what we have received, but how we can be partners, a teammate, to do ministry together. God is urgently asking us to be the salt & light of the world, to be the beacon of hope, to be the people who share God's love, to be the source of God's blessing to others by serving our neighbors, serving those who are in need, and serving the least of these.

It is my confession, and that I know that it is all our confession, that better is one day in God's courts than thousands elsewhere²; it is my hope and desire that I will be where God is moving and working rather than seeing others being in partnership with God from the shoreline; Even though we might be tired and weary, we trust those who seek the kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all these things – the necessary things and more – will be

² Psalm 84:10

given on to us³ and that we are ready to hear and respond to God's clarion call, saying, "Just as I am, O Lamb of God, I come." Amen.

³ Matthew 6:33