

Sermon – “A Survivor’s Tale”

Sunday, February 10, 2019

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

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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

In 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. Seraphs 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. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And 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!"

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The 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." Then 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!"

After sharing the birth of Christ’s narrative, Luke has penned the following main points of Jesus’ to this point: Jesus’ baptism (3:21-22), his temptation in the wilderness (4:1-13), his inaugural sermon and rejection at Nazareth (4:16-30), and a series of healings (4:31-41). As we approach today’s passage, there is a series of events that includes his going to a deserted place to be alone, his being sought out by crowds of people, and his teaching in synagogues (4:42-44). Hear now the Word of the Lord.

Luke 5:1-11

One day as Jesus was standing by the Sea of Galilee, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. He saw at the water’s edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one

belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.”

Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”

When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon’s partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.” So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Let us Pray: Sovereign God, reveal yourself to us this morning that we may feel your presence. Help our hearts to believe and our lips to proclaim that you are God, responding back to you in love by saying Here I am, send me! May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

Title: A Survivor's Tale

Text: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" Isaiah 6:5

Whenever I read today's Isaiah passage, this story immediately comes to my mind.

Few years ago, there was a scare in West Africa that got the attention of the world as they faced one of the deadliest viruses, Ebola. Since then, the World Health Organization has labeled it 2014-16 Ebola outbreak, the largest Ebola epidemic in history. What seemed to be a great distance away from the United States and protected by the natural barrier called the Atlantic Ocean for the virus to cross over, it made news in the headlines, as one of the medical missionaries was flown back to the States side after being exposed to the deadly virus.

The first missionary who came back was Dr. Brantly, who survived the Ebola virus with great medical care that he has received. It speaks volumes of the progress of medicine and how far we have come to fight against such darkness. What got my attention, however, is the response that was given by his wife, Amber, gave during one of the national TV interviews. When news anchor brought up their faith, as Dr. Brantly was there as a medical missionary worker, asking why they are still Christians, the response Amber gave was "We are faithful to God because He is faithful to us first."

Would I have the strength and the audacity to not be afraid, not be discouraged? knowing that God will be with me wherever I go, as promised in Joshua 1:9, would I have answered the same way as I face imminent death that is coming my way? Apparently, Kent and Amber Brantly are taking a page from Isaiah and following suit.

Isaiah 6 starts immediately in a state of awe and wonder as Isaiah has heavenly vision. At first, Isaiah is looking at the high and lofty throne as well as the magnitude of the temple. I think this was the similar reaction that I had when I first visited Westminster and saw this sanctuary. Simply, 'Wowed'. In the midst of shock and awe moment, Isaiah saw the angels or seraphs attending to the will of God, moving about, worshiping the one and True God. Suddenly he could not run away from the fact that he was in the presence of the Holy God, who is ever so pure, ever so holy, that he could not hide this simple fact; he was different, he was not as pure, and like the light obliterates any darkness, he too faced the same fate. He says, "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!"

We need to remember that no fallen human can see God. Moses has gotten a definitive answer from the Lord regarding it. When Moses asked to see God's glory, the answer he received was

“you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.” And the LORD continued, “See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.” (Exodus 33:20-23)

In fact, according to Exodus 34, when Moses came down from the Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant, his face shone just because he had been talking with God! God’s holiness is so pure that even receiving God’s indirect communication radiates and illuminates our soul! So, when Isaiah realizes that he is seeing God in his vision, he thinks he is done! This is his way of saying, “Lord take me now!” in a Biblical language.

This experience was shared by Simon Peter in Luke. After a long night of fishing and catching almost nothing, Jesus shows up to him. He is tired from battling the cold, the wind, and most importantly himself since he didn’t have much to show for his work. Now, rather than going out there to sell whatever small quantities of fish he caught or getting some rest, Simon Peter is asked to pull his boat out “a little distance” with his 2-arm paddle-motor, fighting the same waves that hindered his fishing all night. But something amazing must have happened between then and dropping his net down. He must have heard the radiating power of Jesus’ voice that fed his soul. Simon Peter must have felt the Holiness as Jesus was preaching the Word of God on his boat. Although the words shared by Jesus was to all people who were present, but to Simon Peter, it must have been figuratively and literally saving him, for Peter to yell out on his knees, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”¹

Seeing the amount of fish being caught was simply a validation of what his heart was going through, like the seraph touching the lips of Isaiah with a live coal. Both Isaiah and Peter understood the overflow of grace and love that was coming from their savior, that they will not die, but live. They have been transformed by the presence of God in their lives. They are survivors of having seen God’s glory.

We, too, are survivors of the same. Some of us did not have a heavenly vision or physical manifestation of God’s love for us, but have gone through our own trials and tribulations that God has answered in a powerful way. There maybe some of you who feels like they have not been rescued yet, do not worry. These two stories remind us that God comes to us like a thief in the night², without bells and whistles, making God’s holy presences made known in our lives. It is God who initiates the relationship by coming into our lives (like it or not), it is God who loves us first, it is God who lavishes grace of life to us: it is God who forgives and accepts us the way we are.

¹ Luke 5:8

² 1 Thessalonians 5:2

The question for us to ponder today is how WE are going to respond to this kind of love. God never asks us to be the same as the way we were. God asks in various ways: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”³; “Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people”⁴; or as God asked Brantly’s, ‘would you be faithful?’

Our response allows for the story of God’s work to be shared with others. Isaiah answered, “Here am I; send me”⁵ to his calling and his survivor tale became an Old Testament prophet who foretold of coming Messiah, referred at each Christmas. It has the distinction of being the first scripture read by Jesus at the beginning of the Jesus’ ministry on earth.⁶ Simon Peter’s immediate response of answering God’s call made him Jesus’ first disciple. There were others who had the opportunity to answer Jesus’ call prior to him stepping on to the Simon Peter’s boat. There were other people at the shore or on his boat to make the same commitment, but it was Simon Peter who first recognized Jesus’ love and grace. His survivor tale later becomes the rock Jesus builds his church upon.⁷

Dr. Kent and Amber Brantly and as well as our survival tale is still being formulated. We are rescued by the Lord, which makes us survivors and our lives a survivor’s tale. How are we going share our story and make our survival tale known for God’s glory? Let us ask the Lord for God’s help in our lives: to answer faithfully, to answer courageously, and to answer boldly to God’s calling today. Amen.

³ Isaiah 6:8

⁴ Matthew 4:19, Mark 1:17

⁵ Isaiah 6:8

⁶ Luke 4:18-19

⁷ Matthew 16:18