

## Send Me

### Isaiah 6:1-8

One of my favorite things that I have hanging in my office is this picture of the last verse of today's reading, Isaiah's response to the call of God. It was a gift as I finished college, and I've had it by the door of my dorm room in seminary and by my office door both here and in my office on vicarage. It reminds me of what I'm doing as a pastor, answering the call of God to teach and preach, unworthy though I am.

Sometimes that seems to be how we think of this passage from Isaiah. We see it as a beautiful call story in which Isaiah eagerly accepts the calling to be a prophet. We see it as a good story for those who are in church work or contemplating going into church work. But we miss some things when we simplify it like that. We forget that Isaiah's call comes in a time of national upheaval. We forget that his call begins with Isaiah realizing and understanding his shortcomings. And we forget that the call isn't always a happy, joyful call.

Isaiah's call comes in the year that King Uzziah died, and that reminds us also that holiness is not something to be trifled with. Uzziah ruled for 52 years, and was by all accounts a good king, maybe even the best since Solomon a couple hundred years earlier. He had been an efficient administrator and an able military leader. Under his leadership Judah had grown in every way; economically, militarily, and even in faith.

But as we've seen in our country in recent weeks, any sort of leadership transition creates change and uncertainty. Jotham, Uzziah's successor, had been serving as a coregent with his father after Uzziah was struck with leprosy for burning incense in the temple, something only priests were allowed to do. Jotham would turn out to be a decent king.

Yet Isaiah is reminded that even as human kings change, God is still on His throne. God is still in control. God is the real king, no matter what earthly leaders may think. When the outlook is bleak, look up. Despite the changes and challenges Isaiah faced, God was on His throne and nothing was going to change that.

Isaiah knows that he's not worthy to approach the throne of God. He knows what happens to people who rush in where angels fear to tread. He's come to pray and worship, nothing more. When God appears to him, Isaiah is frightened. He cries out, "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." The holiness of God makes Isaiah aware of his own unholiness.

God doesn't lower the intensity of his holiness for Isaiah. He doesn't become more approachable. Instead, he makes Isaiah worthy to be in his presence, worthy to approach the altar of God. Isaiah's unworthiness is cleansed by a coal from the altar, the same altar Uzziah had tried to use for himself. Isaiah is purified, made holy enough to be in the presence of God. Isaiah's conviction of his sin led to confession, and the confession led to cleansing.

But just allowing Isaiah to remain in the presence of the holy God wasn't enough. Once Isaiah had been cleansed, he had to be sent out to share the message he'd been given. The word of God that had come to him had to go out. The Holy God was on the move again, sending another prophet to call an unholy people back to the presence of a holy God to be purified.

Isaiah doesn't feel prepared to be called by God. He doesn't feel worthy. But at the same time, he doesn't argue with God when he is called like some others do. He doesn't make excuses like Moses does at the burning bush. He doesn't run in the other direction like Jonah does. He is called and accepts.

Isaiah's prophetic ministry wouldn't be easy. The people would refuse to hear what he said, and his message would make others more blind and their hearts more calloused. Their disobedience would lead to exile and destruction. But a holy remnant would remain. And Isaiah's words would go on to point those who came after him to how God was at work in the world through Jesus, to how God was in control even as the world spun out of control. Never underestimate what God can do with one willing worker.

Just as God sent an angel to use the coal to make Isaiah holy, God sends us things to make us holy, too. For we cannot be holy people without the holy things of God: Holy Baptism, the Holy Gospel, Holy Absolution, and Holy Communion. Holy things make holy people. Which is why we come together for worship: you don't want to miss out on what God gives you when you come to worship!

When the holy things of God touch our lips, our ears, and our hearts, then we become holy because the holy Lord comes to us giving gifts of holy things to make us holy as he is holy. He declares us holy and makes us holy by his Word, by his Spirit, and by the blood of Jesus. We no longer need to fear being in the presence of the Holy God, because He has come to us!

One of the safety briefings before takeoff always reminds passengers, in the event that the cabin loses pressure and the oxygen masks deploy, that they are to put on their own mask first before helping someone else put their mask

on. That may seem selfish, but you're no good to anyone if you can't breathe.

As God came to Isaiah to make him holy, as God comes to us to make us holy, so we are called, like Isaiah, to bring that holy presence into an unholy world. The whole world needs to hear about the Holy God who makes us holy. Every person on this planet needs to be touched by the holy things of God so that they too can be made holy and worship the holy Lord forever in heaven. Salvation leads to proclamation. We cannot keep the Holy Gospel to ourselves. We believe in holy things—not just for ourselves, but for the whole world!

Pastor and author Frederick Buechner writes about what that calling looks like. He writes that we are called “[t]o be Christs in whatever way we are able to be. To be Christs with whatever gladness we have and in whatever place, among whatever brothers we are called to. That is the vocation, the destiny to which we were all of called even before the foundations of the world.”

That's why we pray for missionaries as we do every week, as they go where the Spirit is blowing, and are dependent on God to keep them going. If you asked any of the missionaries we pray for every week; Kebede and his family in Ethiopia, the Grulkes in Botswana, the Clausings and Tiffany Smith in Tanzania, and the Hansons in South Korea. They are Christs in the way they are able to be, among the brothers and sisters they are called to be among. They'd tell you that it's not them doing their work, but God doing work through them.

As we celebrate Missions Sunday, you may not feel that God is calling you to go to another country to share the Good News about Jesus. But God is calling you. God has called you. God has placed you where you need to be.

There are words of truth and healing that will never be spoken unless you speak them, deeds of compassion and courage that will never be done unless you do them. Yet God is in control. Your choices are not big enough to derail God's plans. Yet God gives us the opportunity to let Him work through us.

Some churches have a sign at the exit of their parking lot, "You are now entering the mission field." In addition to serving the global mission field consider the fact that: Our families are a mission field. Our occupations are a mission field. And even a trip to the grocery store is a mission field. You are called and sent to many people and many places as you live your normal life. How are you showing God's love to those people and in those places?

Isaiah's call wasn't just a beautiful call story. He felt unworthy and unprepared, and what he was called to do would be difficult. Yet God prepared him, made him holy, and sent him out. He does the same for us.

Holy people also have a holy calling. And so the call goes out: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Isaiah said, "Here am I! Send me." What will your answer be?

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