

Sermon and Scripture for Sunday, May 31, 2015

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!"

John 3:1-17

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

Let us pray...Amen.

This morning's Hebrew scripture from Isaiah describes how Isaiah received his call from God. It was in a vision. We don't know if it was a dream, or a vision while awake, but Isaiah saw God in the temple, seated on the throne there, and the hem of God's robe filled the temple, meaning that the temple, the largest building around, and the one dedicated to the worship of the Lord, wasn't big enough to encompass our God.

The Holy Scriptures are filled with stories of prophets and God's faithful children who hear God's call. In dreams, in visions, through angels, or seraphs, burning bushes and talking animals, many of the important leaders of the Jewish and Christian faiths acted on God's call.

At first glance, you'd think that God doesn't call prophets and the faithful nearly as much as God did in biblical times. I would have to disagree. What I think is happening is that God is calling on the faithful as often, or perhaps even more than God did in biblical times, I just think that we aren't hearing God's call.

With the kind of media overload that we all experience in our lives, the radio, the television, the internet, how could we ever discern God's voice from the chaos? In biblical times, dreams and visions were interpreted as important signs from the Holy. In modern times, we're told that dreams are the way our brains sort through the information gathered during the day, that they are a spillover from the storing of those memories.

It's like God is calling us, but our line is busy. If our phone is a landline, then it's off the hook. If our phone is a cellphone, we never check our voicemail. God's message to the faithful is constant and consistent, and has been since Isaiah's time. It's just that we aren't getting the call anymore.

It may be time for each of us to find a way to turn our spiritual phones on, so that we can receive God's call when it comes. I believe God calls each of us, in a unique a special way. In dreams, in the things that happen to us in our daily lives, in flashes of insight without warning.

And, by the way, if a call did come in from God, wouldn't we say pretty much the same thing Isaiah did? Not me Lord, I'm not worthy! Isaiah said he was a man of unclean lips among a people of unclean lips...the most unworthy of the unworthy. It took a seraph, a flying cobra by the way, to touch his lips with a burning coal from the altar of

the temple to convince Isaiah that God meant him. Only then was Isaiah moved to answer God's question, 'whom shall I send' with 'Here I am; send me!'

We now have the right answer to God's question, which we know comes to us even if we can't hear it. So how do we turn on our phones? How do we prepare for God's call?

I believe it starts with listening. Listening in prayer. Listening in contemplation. Seriously, we're all very busy in our lives: appointments, activities, obligations, we're exhausted before we even get up sometimes!

But what if we tried this: what if, before we closed our eyes at night, we were to ask: what was God trying to tell me today? And what if, right after we open our eyes in the morning, we were to ask: what will God tell me today?

Being open to God's call begins with understanding that God actually calls us! Every day! But it doesn't end there, does it? Because we then have to answer the call. Scripture tells us what the message is going to be, and scripture tells us what the right answer is: 'whom shall I send', is the question, and 'Here I am, send me!' is the answer!

Of course, if we get that far, then we have a few more questions, like, send me where? To do what? With whom?

The details of God's message are important, and that's why we need a good, clear connection so we can get the details right. But most of us can probably make a good guess at those details: where? In the world. To do what? Help those in need. With whom? Our neighbors.

Some of you will remember Janice Barnes, a long-time member of this church. She joined as a teenager, and was known for singing in the choir as well as for her strong opinions! Janice was such a strong believer in this church, in the church of Jesus Christ, and of each of our personal responses to God's call. Except as she neared the end, she became discouraged: she was weaker than she wanted to be, she was unable to attend worship, at first because she couldn't get up and going in time, and then, because she had moved to Bellevue.

But in my visits with her, she found some comfort in this fact: no matter what is going on in our lives, we can always pray. We can pray for others, in their struggles, we can pray for ourselves as well. This gave Janice strength. Being reminded that even if you can't pledge, or attend worship, or go to a meeting, you can always pray. And pray she did.

And pray is what we can do to! We may not be able to feed all of the hungry, or clothe all of the naked, or visit all of the sick or the imprisoned, but we can pray for them, even as we do what we can. Our use of our Endowment Fund is an excellent example of answering God's Call, but it can't be our *only* answer. We each have a personal responsibility to add our own voices to the chorus, 'Here I Am, Lord!' Send me!

And then we have to listen. To listen for God's voice in our lives. In the people around us, in the happenings of our day. We may not have vivid dreams, we may not have thunderous voices directing us to do things, we may not have talking animals telling us what God would have us do. But we already know what God needs us to do, and we already know how God would have us answer.

The answer isn't in blaming those who are less fortunate, it's in having compassion for them. The answer isn't vilifying them for their plight, it's in being patient while they struggle. The answer isn't fixing things for them either, it's in helping our neighbors in need with the resources that will assist them in triumphing over their circumstances.

Compassion, patience, generosity, and most of all prayer.

No matter how challenging our lives, there is someone out there who has it worse. And when God says, whom shall I send, we'll each say, here I am, send me.

Isaiah didn't think he was worthy. We might feel the same. But our sin has departed, and our guilt is blotted out, and now, in thanksgiving for our forgiveness, we can answer God's call with a clear conscience.

What is God trying to tell us today? Let's listen and find out. Amen.