

Called to a Life of Purpose
Isaiah 6:1-8; John 20:21-22
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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 20:21-22

Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’

Sermon

I believe we all want to make a positive difference in the world. I believe we all long to live with purpose. I believe we all want to be used by God to bring light, love, hope, and peace.

Graduates, at this juncture in your lives, I believe these are your desires as you look to the future.

To live a life of purpose does not suggest that you will have only one purpose along your journey. It does not suggest that you will have only one call from God upon your life. God is calling you and will continue to call you

to love God and to love people. Whatever your job may be, wherever you may live, whatever God may hand you, God is calling you – God is calling all of us. That call may take varied forms at different seasons of our lives. But the fundamental call of God will be to love. And as we will discover in our scriptures for today, it will not always be easy.

Isaiah was an ordinary guy. But his call from God came to him in an extraordinary way.

It was a time of change . . . a time of transition. King Uzziah had died. Isaiah was in the temple – the Jewish place of worship – when he saw God. Though the king had died, the Lord had not. The Lord the Almighty, the King of the Universe “sat on a throne, high and lofty.” God was very much alive.

Isaiah’s experience of seeing God and being newly awakened to the holiness of God, brought him to a keen awareness of his sin and the sin of his people. He repented: “I’m lost. 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!”

Isaiah didn’t just mean he and his people had foul mouths. He meant that their hearts, minds, lips, and hands were unclean. They were not honoring God by loving God and loving people.

What Isaiah experienced after he repented was cleansing, purification, and a beautiful “Assurance of Forgiveness.”

“Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.”

What a relief! What a glorious moment of grace, mercy, and forgiveness! Hallelujah! Let’s sing a hymn of praise!

But Isaiah barely had time to feel any of that before God spoke: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”

This would seem “way too soon” if we weren’t already in chapter 6 of Isaiah. You see, for the first five chapters, we read of a series of visions which Isaiah has had concerning the current political and spiritual situation in Judah and Jerusalem. God has been revealing to Isaiah the corruption of his nation, of his religious leaders, and of the people. God has been revealing to Isaiah that his nation’s disobedience and corruption will have consequences that are far-reaching. Among the things the Lord says is “It is you who have devoured the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?” (3:14-15) God said in one of the visions: **“Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before**

my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.”

So, Isaiah heard what God said next to him in the temple within the context of five chapters worth of visions he had experienced before this moment. God said, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Whom shall I send to speak truth to the powerful? Whom shall I send to the religious folks who are following leaders who have forgotten God? Whom shall I send to the ordinary folks who are misguided and who are sinning in thought, word, and deed?

And Isaiah said, “Here am I; send me!” I’ll go, he said. I’ll try to get people to remember what God truly asks of his people. He calls people in the same way Micah did: **“Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.”**

Our world today is not so very different from Isaiah’s world. We continue to do evil and need to learn to do good. As a world, as a nation, and as individuals, we fall short in **“seeking justice, rescuing the oppressed, defending the orphan, pleading for the widow.”**

As we read in Isaiah: “The spoil of the poor is in our houses, and we grind the faces of the poor.” In chapter 4 of Isaiah, Isaiah receives these words: “Ah, you call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Ah, you who are wise in your own eyes, and shrewd in your own sight! Ah, you who are heroes in drinking wine and valiant at mixing drink, **who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of their rights!** (Isaiah 4:20-23)

Isaiah’s call wasn’t “rainbows and butterflies and unicorns.”

And while our callings may not be as heavy or intense as Isaiah’s were, we all share the basic call of loving God and loving our neighbors (all other people) as we love ourselves. We all share a call to seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, and plead for the widow.” And that will seldom be as easy as it sounds.

To answer God’s call in our lives, we begin with considering the One who is calling us. We remember that God is alive, God is holy, God is just, God is merciful, God is kind. We remember that God is the King, not any human leader, and to God we owe our allegiance. We remember that God loved us first. We also remember that as God called and sent Jesus, so also are we sent by Jesus to a broken world – within our homes, within our churches, within our schools, within our workplaces, within our communities, within our nation, and within our world. We remember that we are not alone. We, too, have received the breath of the Holy Spirit and the peace of God which passes all human understanding.

To answer God's call in our lives, requires humility. Face to face with our Holy God, Isaiah was immediately aware of his own unholiness. He recognized his own sin and that of his people and he repented. May it be so with us as we encounter and respond to God's presence and holiness.

To answer God's call will require courage, perseverance, and community. Doing the right thing, standing up for the right people, helping those who need help the most takes courage. Living a life of purpose takes perseverance every day. It also takes working alongside others. It takes community.

I think many of us love the hymn "Here I am, Lord," which we heard our choir sing earlier. Let's remember these words which reflect Isaiah's call and our own as we respond to God: "Here I am, Lord. Send me."

*I the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin, my hand will save. I who made the stars of
night, I will make their darkness bright. Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?*

*I, the Lord of snow and rain, I have borne my people's pain. I have
wept for love of them. They turn away. I will break their hearts of stone, give
them hearts for love alone. I will speak my word to them. Whom shall I
send?*

*I, the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame. I will set a
feast for them. My hand will save. Finest bread I will provide till their hearts
be satisfied. I will give my life for them. Whom shall I send?*

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night. I
will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.*

This is the purpose to which we are called. Whom shall God send? Is it you? Is it me? Here we are, Lord. We will go if you lead us. We will hold your people in our hearts.