

God Calls Us
Isaiah 6:1-8
Luke 5:1-10

Westminster Presbyterian Church
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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!'

Luke 5:1-10

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 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. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' Simon answered, 'Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.' When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; 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.'

Isaiah is a priest in the kingdom of Judah in the eighth century BC – about the time that the city of Rome is being founded. He goes into the Holy of Holies, a small room right in the center of the Temple in Jerusalem.

This part of the Temple was built to be the resting place of God. This room is so holy that only priests are allowed to go there, and only one priest goes in, once per year, on the holiest of holy days.

It is dangerous to go there. There is a danger that the priest might see God.

It is dangerous to see God.

Adam and Eve used to see God on a regular basis, before the Fall, but, you remember, after they ate the forbidden fruit, they hid from God. Moses saw God up on the mountain, but only briefly, God's back in passing. God told Moses that Moses would not survive seeing God's face.¹

So, when Isaiah enters the Holy of Holies and sees God, he figures that he is a dead man. Isaiah realizes the danger that he is in, and here we see why he is a famous prophet. Where many of us would say something about as profound as, "Oh, <expletive>," 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!"²

¹ Exodus 33:18-23.

² Yes, it is true that we have a recounting, not candid camera video – it's entirely possible that he fixed his own dialogue in the retelling.

God is not just a human being writ large. God is truly holy, beyond what we can even comprehend. Isaiah is not worthy to see God. Isaiah cannot do anything to make himself worthy to see God or to speak for God.

One of the seraphs, God's attendants, takes a coal from the fire, touches the coal to Isaiah's lips, and informs him that his sin has been blotted out. He is now worthy to speak on behalf of the Lord God of Hosts.

Then the Lord says to Isaiah, "Whom shall I send?"

Isaiah says, "Here I am. Send me!"

In our New Testament reading this morning, we see something similar. Jesus does a miracle, causing Simon and his partners to catch more fish than they can even handle. Simon makes the intuitive leap: he sees who this is. His response is the same as Isaiah's, if a little less eloquent: "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" He knows that it is God who stands before him, and that he is not worthy to see God.

It is dangerous to see God.

It is dangerous to see God, because no one who does, remains the same. It changes people.

Moses went from being a shepherd with an anger problem to being God's spokesperson.

Isaiah went from being one priest among many to being God's prophet, speaking truth to kings and generals, whether they wanted to hear it or not.

Simon went from being a fisherman to being Peter, Jesus' right-hand man who healed the sick, preached to crowds, and led the church after Jesus' Ascension.

When we see God, it humbles us. It exposes the complete and uncensored truth about who we are. Not who we would like to be. Not who we pretend to other people that we are. Not even who we pretend to ourselves that we are. God sees us as we are, without any illusions.

God sees us as we are, and God loves us. Isaiah was a man of unclean lips, who lived among a people of unclean lips. He did not deserve to stand before God as if he were truly a holy man, holy like God is holy. But God saw him as he was, and God loved him. God did not obliterate him. God forgave him and cleansed him.

God sees us as we are, and God loves us, but God loves us too much to leave us the way we are. God cleanses us in our baptism, giving us grace that we did not earn, grace we could not earn. God gives us what we need to do what God asks of us.

My siblings, God is still here to be seen, if we just pay attention.

God is here in the eyes of a hungry child who needs good meals to live and to grow.

God is here in the stranger to this land, who needs someone to welcome her.

God is here in the sick and the prisoner, the refugee, the widow, and the orphan.³

God is here in the vulnerable person being harassed.

Remember, Jesus said, "just as you did it to one of the least of ...my family you did it to me."⁴

If you look, you will see God, but, if your goal is to be comfortable, I would not recommend it.

You see, it is dangerous to see God.

If you see God, you will be changed.

God sees to the core of who we are, beyond all the illusions and pretense.

God cleanses us in baptism.

³ Matthew 25:31-46, Jeremiah 7:3-11.

⁴ Matthew 25:40

And God sends us out, to do God's work in the world – not to stand by and watch, but to love God and our neighbors; to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.⁵

God wants the world made one step more like the Kingdom of Heaven, and God says, "Whom shall I send?"

God asks this question all the time. I pray that all of our answer would be, "Here am I, send me."

AMEN.

⁵ Micah 6:8.