

God Invites

Isaiah 6:1-13, Luke 5:1-11

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to hear from God? If you have heard from God, were you open to what he asked of you? I've told my story before, so you already know I was not good about responding to God's call. It took me almost 20 years to even investigate if I had any pastoral gifts and it's been almost another 20 to get to today. You can see that I might identify with the characters in today's Scripture stories! Let's look at these two call stories, starting with Isaiah.

One day Isaiah turns up in the temple at Jerusalem, and there, much to his surprise, he sees the Lord in glory, a figure so tremendous that the hem of his robe alone fills the vast spaces of the temple.

Surrounding the Lord are attending angels known as seraphim. Like fans at the Super Bowl, they are cheering and shouting *so* loud that the Temple itself starts to shake. And what is it they are shouting?

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is full of his glory!”

They are cheering loudly for Team God. The words “Holy, holy, holy” appear repeatedly in praise songs to our God and well, they should! He is worthy of all glory, honor, and praise.

Isaiah, however, is shocked and dismayed to see the Lord God there before him. He understands that if one were to see God face to face he would surely die. In fear, he laments his sinfulness and that of his people. Then something happens that Isaiah is not expecting.

One of the seraphs, God's angel attendants, picks up a hot burning coal from the altar. (Altars then looked like barbecues today because sacrifices were burnt on them) The angel picks up the hot burning coal using a pair of tongs. (Apparently even angels must be careful with fire.) Then the angel presses the coal against Isaiah's lips, burning away his sins. (Only angels may do this. Do not try kissing a hot barbecue brickette!) The angel pronounces him clean; Isaiah's sin has been blotted out.

But what has happened is only the beginning. Now Isaiah hears the Lord's voice asking: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" The Lord has a job to assign and is looking for a volunteer. Despite God not outlining the task at hand, Isaiah, newly free from his sins, volunteers; "Here I am. Send me!"

This is the story of Isaiah's call. It happens one day in the temple. Moreover, we are told that it happens in a particular year, "the year that King Uzziah died."

The death of the king, any king, brings with it instability and uncertainty. Will there be a smooth succession? What changes will

occur? Will the next king rule justly and effectively, or will the people experience oppression and chaos and suffering? Is this sounding familiar?

It is during this uncertain season that Isaiah sees the Lord high and lifted up and accepts an invitation, not without pain, to speak on behalf of the Lord. Some would call Isaiah foolish for doing this. Better to play it safe.

But Isaiah accepts the difficult, life-changing commission. He becomes a prominent prophet in ancient Israel, the founder of a succession of prophets responsible for the biblical book named for him. Isaiah foolishly agrees to bring the Lord's message to the people during a challenging time, starting with the year that King Uzziah died.

The foolish acceptance of an invitation appears in the other story we heard this morning, that one about Jesus and Simon Peter and a large catch of fish.

Simon the fisherman is in his element. He has the sunburn and the muscles to prove it. Boats are a major part of his business. He's let this new rabble-rousing rabbi use his boat as a floating pulpit to speak to the crowd on shore. This young rabbi, Jesus, is done talking, and asks Simon to put out into deep water. No doubt he wants to leave the crowd behind, and so Simon obliges.

Then the rabbi tells Simon, “**Let down your nets for a catch.**” How foolish! Simon has heard of the carpenter from Nazareth, what would he know about fishing? Put out now?! Simon had worked all through the night, and has nothing to show for it. The area is obviously empty of fish. The nets have been painstakingly washed and put away. Besides, now is the wrong time of day to start fishing. You can’t expect a miracle.

But this rabbi sounds right, and so Simon tosses out the nets. This familiar task now feels novel. He’s doing what he’s done so many times, but now it is an act of obedience.

Moments later, his boat tips to one side, and looking down into the water, Simon sees his net alive with fish, more than he’s ever taken, the sort of catch that dreams are made of.

It’s all so wrong, his fisherman experiences tell him! Fish by the hundreds don’t crowd into a net, at that place, at that hour of the day. Yet it’s all so right: two boats are needed to haul this catch to shore. It’s enough to make tough old fishermen wide-eyed with wonder.

Simon’s boat and these familiar waters are now a holy spot, all because of the rabbi’s command. Not unlike a long-ago burning bush in the middle of the desert. Awestruck, the burly fisherman falls at the feet of the rabbi, begging him to leave. Simon fears he will be blinded by eternal brightness.

Then Jesus ups the ante. Fish are fine, but Simon has a new task. Jesus will leave, but Simon's to follow. He's to catch people instead, and by catching them to set them free.

These stories of Simon and Isaiah reveal a pattern, a pattern that occurs in our lives as well.

It may happen at a time of crisis, the transitional year when the king is dead or when a new president takes office. It may happen some place where we used to know how life works. In either case a word of grace and power is spoken—directly to us. Will we hear this invitation?

Simon pays attention after a night of failed fishing and empty nets. Isaiah pays attention when old certainties no longer prevail.

God addresses us as well. He speaks a word of grace and power—now in a year of crisis, here in a familiar place. God lets Isaiah overhear the divine pondering: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”

Jesus offers Simon Peter the startling suggestion: **“Put out in the deep, and let down your nets for a catch.”**

We are living in a world of uncertainty. God is calling the church to act in turbulent times. I thank Robin for offering to serve as our peace advocate and providing information and tools for us to use in our little corner of the world. Do *you* hear the Lord's invitation addressed to us, here in this familiar place, now at this challenging time? Like Isaiah, like Simon Peter, may we pay attention and dare to act.

Pray –

Lord, speak that we may hear, hasten our hearts and minds to your call.

Lead us in your ways of peace. May your kingdom come. AMEN

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Based on:

Foolish Invitations Luke 5:1-11

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