

February 20, 2022
Rev. Kerry Smith

God is Calling, Why?
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Isaiah 55:10-13

New Revised Standard Version

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

“I was 43 when the pandemic began. I am now 60.”¹ I read this line recently in an article written by Steven Kurutz. That line got my attention because it defies the laws of physics and common sense, but what we all have endured these last two years has aged us in body, mind, and spirit. An article in the scientific journal *Nature* last month suggested that the pandemic accelerated the aging process not only for people who contracted Covid but for all of us affected by the upheaval and isolation of remote life. We are weary and we have this chronic blah feeling. We feel thrown off course. In the article Dr. Arbaje is quoted saying, “It’s the sense of disconnect from your purpose: ‘Why am I even here?... Once you begin to lose touch with that, it creates a sense of chronic stress, which can directly accelerate aging.’”

Why am I even here? We have been talking about calling the last few weeks. God calls all people into ministry and gives each person gifts for that ministry. The question for us is, “What is God asking of us now, and how shall we go about accomplishing it?” We are asking God to use us, to show us how to take who we are, who we want to be, and what we can do and use all of it for a purpose greater than ourselves.²

We heard a passage from Isaiah this morning. That chapter starts out with these wonderful words, “All of you who are thirsty, come to the water!” Isaiah is talking to people who had to leave their homeland, had their families torn apart, and their houses demolished.³ They weren’t sure if they believed in the God of their ancestors anymore. Isaiah is trying to remind folks who have had challenge after challenge that there is hope, that God is with them, that there will be restoration after exile. He is speaking a life-giving word of hope when all the events seem to point to the contrary. In fact, when life seems the most hopeless, the best way out of the darkness and into the light is to be hopeful.

It is a reminder for us that God’s power can transform our broken world. All creation can be mended and restored. The exiles can go home and live in peace. The impossible can seem possible again when we remember that God is God. Isaiah was talking to Judeans 600 years before Jesus was born, but it is a word of hope that we need to hear today during these pandemic times. It feeds our soul, renews our purpose, and gives us life.

Isaiah was written before the Bible was codified, so God’s word refers to God’s work in our world more broadly. Isaiah uses imagery of rain and snow. In the Bible the economy was agricultural, and the amount of rain could mean the difference between life and death.⁴ God’s activity in our world is like rain, it can transform dry land into conditions able to sustain food that we need to eat to survive. Rain makes life grow and it also ensures that there will be food for the next year. We can feel the cool dampness of the rain, we can see the greenness of the land,

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/10/style/self-care/covid-pandemic-aging.html>

² <https://twitter.com/thekingcenter/status/1320389731532800000>

³ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/reviced-common-lectionary/ordinary-15/commentary-on-isaiah-5510-13-2>

⁴ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/reviced-common-lectionary/ordinary-15/commentary-on-isaiah-5510-13>

and we can taste bread in our mouths. That is what God in our world is like. God refreshes us. God gives us life. God gives us hope.

A call from God always seems impossible. We wonder who am I? Can I do this? Or we think this is beyond us. God doesn't call us to do something that we can already do on our own. And God doesn't call us to sustain the status quo. God calls us to be instruments of transformation in our world. Transformation toward a just, peaceful, and compassionate world can only happen with the power of the Holy Spirit. The impossibility of our call necessitates that we rely on God's guidance, strength, and movement and remember that it is not we who are making something happen but God.

Isaiah wants us to know that when we do something in the name of God, it doesn't return empty. God calls us for a reason and God will use whatever we do for good in the world. As we have talked about call these last few weeks, we have begun worship by remembering our baptism when we are named, called, and become a part of the body of Christ. Water is a divine gift and through baptism we are incorporated into God's mighty acts of salvation and given new birth through water and the Spirit. It is God's gift to us that we share in Christ's royal priesthood.

Why am I even here? It seems to me that sometimes we feel like we have to do something extraordinary. You do not need to be extraordinary. You need to be the ordinary inhabited by the extraordinary life of God. A word, a meal, a cup of cold water, they all have the capacity to bring the life of God to this world and delight God's heart.⁵ Our job as Christians is to speak a word of hope to a world in desperate need of hope. The harder task might be to live into that promise of hope, to make the life-giving word from God our own. To let our hope define our reality, instead of our eyes.

I remember visiting a church years ago that had on the front of the bulletin, "Every member is a minister." We talk about the priesthood of all believers because we believe that we are called to proclaim the mighty acts of God who called us out of darkness into God's marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). We care for people, we work together, we grow together, and we help each other.

All week I kept thinking about a vision board that I had to make when I was on the high school drill team. I chose a yellow poster board because it was a bright color and I put pictures of my friends and family on it. In the middle of the board I put in the best handwriting I could the words from Philippians 4:13 which was my favorite Bible verse at the time. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." It was a way for me to remember that God was with me every step of the way, when I was scared, when I was uncertain, when I was sad.

Psychologists say that if we can visualize what we want, it increases our motivation, our confidence, and even our motor performance. In fact there was one study that found that when athletes visualized doing well, it was almost as effective as physical practice. I remember that when practicing for job interviews or hard conversations, the more I could visualize it and see myself having the conversation, the more my heart was put at ease. There are lots of things we can visualize, learning how to relax, being more patient, improving our relationships, traveling more, finding a job we adore, or simply being kinder to ourselves. It starts with figuring out what is most important to us.

The important thing for us to remember is that the Spirit is with us. When God calls us, our job is to trust. Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, than to trust and obey. Writer Thomas Merton said, "All the good that you will do will not come from you but from the fact that you have allowed yourself, in the obedience of faith, to be used by God's

⁵ <https://twitter.com/DianeLangberg/status/1485379789884215302>

love.”⁶ What is God asking of us now, and how shall we go about accomplishing it?” Until we figure out the answer, may we take care of our soul by praying every day, reading Scripture every day, and meditating every day. Amen.

⁶ The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters, by Thomas Merton, excerpts from p. 294-297.