

Isaiah 6:1-8

New Revised Standard Version

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!"

I wonder if you have ever been bored in church? Why is it that church is boring? Writer Annie Dillard wrote that Christians don't have the foggiest idea what sort of power we invoke. She said we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares. She said ushers should lash us to our pews because the sleeping God may wake.<sup>1</sup> What if you received a life preserver along with the bulletin? We have been talking about how God calls all people into ministry and gives each person gifts for that ministry. We are invited to listen for and respond to God who is calling us into the world to love and serve others.

Today we hear God calling Isaiah. Isaiah is doing something quite ordinary. He is visiting the temple, but he has a mystical encounter with God and it is not boring. Isaiah encounters the awesome nature of God. Isaiah says the temple is filled with the hem of God's robe. We have a tendency to domesticate God, God who is the creator of all things. God who is unknowable mystery. Very few people have an experience like Isaiah's where things are so clear.

How do you experience the holy? Does it feel like peace when the world is falling down all around you? Does it feel like a breeze on a beautiful day? Does it sound like beautiful piano music or singing a song at the top of your lungs? Or maybe singing lyrics that make you feel truly known and seen? There are different ways God's holiness is revealed. Isaiah has an angelic visitation with heavenly beings whose voices are so loud they make the building shake when they sing.

Isaiah encounters the awesome God and his response is honesty and confession. Isaiah tells God not only is he sinful but the people he is around are sinful as well and that God is going to have to get away. "I am a man of unclean lips among people of unclean lips." Is there something about our experience of the holy that makes us recognize our sinfulness? When we feel God's presence in such a powerful way and we are overwhelmed with the sense that God is God and we are not. Now, I give thanks that the way Isaiah experienced forgiveness is not how we experience forgiveness. The seraph touched Isaiah's mouth with a burning hot coal to burn his sins away.

It makes me think of what is known as the Jesus Prayer which is thought to be from the the Egyptian desert with the desert fathers and desert mothers in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. John Chrysostom wrote a letter in 407 AD that uses part of prayer. Philimon wrote this exact prayer in 600 AD. It is easy to remember, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." To follow God, you have to be forgiven and to be forgiven all you have to do is ask.

Then, we hear those wonderful words that make me want to break out in song, God says, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!" We all have

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<sup>1</sup> Annie Dillard in her essay, "An Expedition to the Pole" in her book *Teaching a Stone to Talk*.

different gifts, but we are all called to follow. Do you know how to follow Jesus in daily life? To me it is a minute by minute decision to love God and to love my neighbor. That's why we come to worship, to hear the call and learn to follow Jesus, and teach each other to follow Jesus.

Today we have the great honor of receiving two of our Confirmation kids as they claim the Christian faith for themselves. One of the questions that always comes up in Confirmation is if we Methodists are once saved, always saved people. We are not because we are free to resist God's love and grace. God saves us but then it is in our ongoing, living relationship with God through faith that God's saving intention is fully realized in our lives. We can move so far away from the saving streams of God's love and power that we parch and spiritually die.<sup>2</sup> But, God's grace is unfailing and always there. We may lose our way and do terrible things to others, but God is out to save us, one and all, because we are always, always loved.

I love that after Isaiah experienced God's forgiveness and cleansing, he was quick to volunteer to serve God even before he knew what God wanted him to do. He was so overwhelmed with gratitude for God's grace that he placed himself completely in God's hands. He knew God had taken care of his past, so God could have his future. One of my favorite Bible verses is Micah 6:8, "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." God is calling us to do that work. God asks, "Whom shall I send?" Are we willing to say yes? Here am I, send me!

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-do-united-methodists-believe-once-saved-always-saved-or-can-we-lose-our-salvation>