

Isaiah 6:1-13

Callings

Luke 5:1-11

February 9, 2025

“I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the Temple.” This is the way the 6th chapter of the Book of Isaiah begins. Thus begins the story of the prophet and the people he loved and lived for. They were the Israelites, of course, more particularly the Judeans, and they were having trouble.

It is a majestic calling. It happened in the Temple, if it were today it would have happened in a cathedral with a vaulted ceiling and stained glass. It happened with Seraphim, strange winged creatures singing, “holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, the whole earth is filled with his glory.” The Book of Isaiah provides a vision of the people, and for the people, and stands as one of the earliest theological interpretations of life and history.

Unlike some religious leaders, both in Isaiah’s time and in ours, present company included, who proclaim a message that makes us feel good and is meant to be hopeful, Isaiah was known for being more realistic in his assessment of things. He presided over the decline and fall of the Northern Israelite civilization. And he simply wouldn’t tell the Judeans that things were okay. Though he was a prophet of great vision and hope, he was also a truth-teller of the realistic.

Just listen to the message he was called to proclaim to Israel,

“‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding, ever seeing but never perceiving.’ Make the heart of this people calloused, make their eyes dull, and close their ears. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts; and turn and be healed.”

Then, sensing not only the urgency, but also the tragedy of the message, Isaiah asked how long it would all take. And the answer he was given,

“Until the houses are left deserted, and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the Lord has sent everyone away and the land is utterly forsaken. And though a tenth remain in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and the oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land.”

Thus Isaiah was called to speak, and thus he spoke. It doesn’t sound like the kind of message the people would have liked or accepted very well, and my suspicion is that in large part they didn’t.

The reason Isaiah’s message was passed on from generation to generation isn’t because the people to whom it was given liked it, responded in repentance, and accepted its medicine; rather, it is because the

tragic promises in fact did come true. What Isaiah was told to proclaim, happened, with the deserted houses and the ruined fields.

Later, when Jesus was beginning his time of public ministry, he also put out a call. The scene has moved from the temple to a very down-to-earth scene of everyday life. And in the case of the first disciples, they were professional fishermen, I don't mean in the sporting sense, but in the commercial one.

Jesus had used their boats as a platform to speak to the people in the crowd who were gathered along the sea to hear him. When he concluded his remarks he told them to put away from the shoreline and drop their nets. When they did they caught two full boatloads of fish and realized they were in the presence of, if not Isaiah's kind, at least some kind of holiness.

Peter's reply was actually similar to Isaiah's. Isaiah had said, "woe to me, I am a man of unclean lips." Peter said, "get away from me, I am a sinful man." Both statements mean the same thing. It was not that they were in the presence of greatness, but holiness; James and John were there too, with the sky itself as their vaulted ceiling.

One of the differences between the two "calling" scenes has to do with the majesty of the Lord's presence in the scene with Isaiah, set next to the

ordinary everyday setting of the calling of Peter, James, and John.

Isaiah was caught up in a vision of a great heavenly courtroom with the Lord seated on the throne and Seraphs all around. Peter, James, and John were down in the earthiness of fishing. It was unsanitary, wet, and likely cold. My guess is they were often scolded by their mothers for their language.

We find God present both in blessed visions which jolt a person into re-examining themselves and their lives, and also in day-to-day ordinary pursuits, at jobs where people are just trying to make a living. Perhaps that is just a way of saying that if it is right for us to come to church to look for God, we should also look for God when we leave.

The term "vocation" is derived from the Latin, "vocare," which simply means, "to call." The term, "ecclesia," which is often translated, "church," means, "the collection of those who have been called out," Like Isaiah, Peter, James, and John, had been called out.

In the last century, it is word given when someone is called on the phone, summoned by the ringtone of the smart phone. For us, a "calling" refers to a strong feeling of suitability for a particular career or occupation or task.

There is another sense in which we have a *Christian* vocation, and by this I do not mean a religious one. We are all, no matter our jobs, called to be disciples, learners, Christ followers. One of the ironies about receiving a call to be a Christ follower is that it does not necessarily require that we change jobs, or locations, or maybe not even activities, but to live a different life in our circumstances.

That is to say, we have another vocation; and that other vocation demands of us that we be realists, like Isaiah, who faced facts. His nation was in decline largely because its people were calloused of heart, unwilling to set aside selfish interests for someone else's sake.

They were arrogant about their status in the world, and their arrogance blinded them. The nation was headed for a full scale destruction. Their story is not theirs alone, it is the story of the human race; it would be a mistake not to acknowledge, it is our story.

It sounds gloomy. But don't be discouraged. It is not hopeless, but hope full. Isaiah asked his people to set aside their smaller vision of a world in which only *their* people could be thought of as good and right and acceptable, for a grander vision of the whole world caught up in God's grace.

And like Peter and James and John, we are called to be "fishers of people," which means to care for and

seek the well-being of others; to help them see God's purpose and presence in their lives, to show them the reality of forgiveness and acceptance, and to be their friend for Christ's sake.

We are called to be good, honest, kind, generous, and helpful; and more besides. It is our vocation to be these things no matter the situation. To be sure, along the way we will find ourselves forced to admit that we are ourselves people of this world, as guilty as the rest, and also summoned.

If you open the eyes of the spirit, and the ears of the heart, you can still see the Lord seated on a throne, high and lifted up. If you listen, you can hear it still, the voice calling.

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