

Isaiah 6:1-13

Calling

Luke 5:1-11

“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, and they were having trouble.

It is a majestic calling. It happened in the Temple, if it were today it would happen in a cathedral. 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 whole 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, who stand proclaim a message that makes us feel good and gives us a false hope, 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 them 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 eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts; and turn and be healed.”

Then Isaiah, sensing not only the urgency, but also the tragedy of the message, 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.

Remember, 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 houses left deserted and the fields ruined.

The First Disciples

Later, when Jesus was beginning his time of public ministry, he also put out a call. The voice of the Lord is always asking, “whom shall I send, who will go for us?” The scene has moved from a temple to a very realistic 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 has 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 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, and we are told they left everything to follow Jesus.

The Ordinary

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, and the ordinary realism 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.

We find God present both in blessed visions which jolt a person into re-examining themselves and their lives, and also in rather 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 it is right for us to come to church to look for God, but that we should also look for God when we leave.

Vocation

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.

For us, a “calling” refers to a strong feeling of suitability for a particular career or occupation.” It means that our jobs are more than just a means to a living. They are meaningful work.

Let me say at this point that there is a bit of a danger here, that the only jobs worth considering as vocations

are the higher ones; doctors, teachers, ministers, soldiers, public servants, etc., that more mundane jobs like truck driver, garbage collector, ditch-digger, or miner, are not worthy of such a distinguished title.

But that is a false distinction. God “calls” people to work at what we might call “less noble” endeavors, but in them one can serve God’s kingdom just as well. The church as Christ’s body must lift up those whose callings seem to us to be less inspiring.

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, students, learners, followers. One of the ironies about receiving a call to be a 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.

To What

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; thus 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 nation 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.

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

[Back](#)

[Home](#)