

Isaiah's Call, Our Call

One week ago today was Pentecost. A day that commemorates the coming of the Holy Spirit, a story told in the Book of Acts. The vestments in our “temple,” or as we call it, our sanctuary, had changed, as if overnight. Where they had been white, they were now red, and orange, and yellow, the colors of the Holy Spirit. We talked about how the Holy Spirit comes to each one of us, like individual flames of fire, and how God calls each one of us to be his helpers, his missionaries sent out into the world.

But it turned out that God had already been calling people to be his missionaries for a long time. Pastor Nadine took us way back in the Old Testament, to the book of Exodus. We heard a sermon about how God had called Moses. Coming to him in a burning bush, of all things (what is it with fire and God, anyway?). Moses essentially said to God, “Who, me?” Convinced that he was the wrong person for the job, that he was too imperfect. But as we heard from Pastor Nadine, God essentially said to him, “Yes, you!”

And today it has happened again. **“In the year King Uzziah died.”** When God calls us, we tend to remember. Sometimes we can even narrow it down to a specific day, and even time of day. I—Isaiah—narrow it down simply to a specific year. But believe me when I say it is a day forever etched in my mind.

It was like a dream. A dream in which I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty. Of course in my dream it was “high and lofty,” and of course it was in the temple—where else would God be? Don’t you usually picture God as being “up there,” above us, in the heavens?

Seraphs were in attendance above him. Do you know what the word “seraph” means in Hebrew? (Your Doctor Miller probably does.) “Burning one.” What is it with fire and God, anyway? I remember that these seraphs each had six wings. With two of them, they covered their faces. Do you know why? Because you can’t look directly at God’s face and live. It would be like looking at the sun. Only worse. (Or maybe I should say, “better!”) Looking at God would be like looking at the brightest thing you can imagine, only ten thousand times brighter.

With two of their wings, these seraphs also covered their “feet.” Do you know why I used scare quotes? It’s because in the Old Testament, “feet” is a euphemism for our genitals. Our “private parts,” you all would say in scare quotes. At least we try to keep them private. From God, anyway. It’s because God is so holy. And let’s face it, we’re not. In comparison to God, we’re just . . . I don’t know . . . something obscene. Like, our genitals.

Then these seraphs started singing, “Holy. Holy. Holy.” Singing that one word three times. As if once wasn’t enough. As if they and we need three times to capture God’s greatness and holiness. Three times to represent God’s completeness. God is more than just “one.” God is “three.” God is Trinity (so your theologians like to say).

As the seraphs were singing, the temple began to shake, like an earthquake, or maybe for you here in Kansas, a tornado. How many of you have seen a tornado? But how many of you have actually been in one, or at least near one, near enough to feel your house shaking around you? Can you imagine how terrifying that must be? Then the house began to fill up with smoke. (And as the saying goes, “Where there’s smoke, there’s fire.” What is it about fire and God?)

This was the point where I just gave up. And fell on my face. And cried out **“woe is me! I am lost.”** I knew that I was as good as dead. I knew that the seraphs knew that I was not holy (not even once, let alone three times). Because, let’s face it, I am a man of unclean lips. A man absolutely full of sin. It’s amazing how much sin is caused by our lips. By the things we say. By the horrible, hateful, vulgar things that come out of our mouths.

You know I’m not just talking about myself, right? That I’m also talking about you? I’m standing here in a room full of sinners. **I live among a people of unclean lips.**

But then one of these seraphs, these “burning ones,” flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. I knew it had to be unbearably hot. It glowed bright orange. (What is it about fire and God, anyway?) I could tell that he planned to touch my lips with it. And I shrank back, to protect myself. But of course, I couldn’t escape, and I couldn’t hide. Did it burn? Did it hurt? Oh yeah! I mean, God is holy, right? Three times holy. And we’re not, right? When the holy meets the unholy, it hurts, right? When God comes to us, it’s only natural to shrink back. But all we can really do is brace ourselves for the unbearable, unbelievable pain.

But then the seraph said, “Now that this has touched your lips, **your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.** What did he mean? All of it? Where did it go? How could that be? Sin doesn’t just disappear. It stays with us forever, like a millstone around our necks. Or does it? You people, are you hearing this? Did you know this was possible, for your sin to just “depart?” Don’t you think that would be worth a little pain? Even a lot of pain?

All of a sudden, I heard the Lord speaking. It’s like I couldn’t hear it before. Like my ears had been closed my whole life, but now they were open. The Voice said **“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”** Being the rational, literal person that I am, my first thought was, wait, who is the almighty talking to? Who is “us?” Is God an “us?” Is God more than one person? Is God three? That’s kind of confusing, isn’t it?

But by this time I didn’t really care that it was confusing, that it didn’t make sense to my mortal mind. This holy, confusing God had sent with the seraph a burning ember (what is it about fire and God, anyway?) And that burning ember had taken away my sins. Sent them away. Blotted them out. Burned them up.

So after God did that for me—for me!—how could I not go? And so I just blurted out, **“Here am I; send me!”** *Hinei*, “Here am I,” as if to say, what you see is what you get, God. It’s broken and imperfect, but *hinei*, here am I. I’ll go. Send me. Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee. Take my lips, and let them be filled with messages from thee. Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of thy love. Take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for thee. Take my feet, Lord—yes, even my genitals. They’re yours, God. They’re all yours.

I can imagine it’s going to be pretty hard at times. It’s a big, complicated, troubled world out there. There are a whole lot of people, with a whole lot of unclean lips. But God—El, Yahweh, whatever your holy name is—if you think you can use me, if you really want to use me, then use me. I’m all yours. *Hinei*, here I am; send me!”