

Sermon – February 7, 2010
Send Me!

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Isaiah 6:1-8

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!” Isaiah 6:8

In our first reading today from Luke’s Gospel, we heard about the transforming encounter Peter had with Jesus along the shores of the Sea of Galilee after spending a fruitless night of fishing. Our second reading from the book of Isaiah also recorded another encounter with the Living God. Isaiah, either in the Temple itself or in a vision of some sort, is brought face-to-face with the awesome God in all God’s glory and majesty.

What would it have been like? What would we have experienced if we were with Peter in that fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee or with Isaiah as he saw this glorious vision of God? In fact, that’s a good question to ask today – have you ever seen the Lord? Have you ever experienced that overwhelming sense of being in the presence of God? Our immediate answer may be to say no, but if we stop to think for a moment...

As I was pondering this question, the words of an old song I used to sing in youth group years ago came to mind. The song is entitled “Have You Seen Jesus My Lord?” and it was written by singer John Fisher. The chorus poses the question: “Have you seen Jesus my Lord? He’s here in plain view. Take a look, open your eyes, He’ll show it to you.” The first verse asks “Have you ever looked at the sunset with the sky mellowin’ red, and the clouds suspended like feathers? Then I say you’ve seen Jesus my Lord.” Certainly all of us have experienced this vision of God’s reality at one time or another! I remember coming home from a mission trip years ago, tired and exhausted from the experience. As I was driving home, a beautiful sunset exploded on the horizon. As I watched the colors

change, I felt God's presence and the words "Well done" echo in my spirit – God's real presence! I felt as though I was face-to-face with our awesome God!

The song continues "Have you ever stood at the ocean with the white foam at your feet? Felt the endless thundering motion? Then I say you've seen Jesus my Lord." The ocean is our favorite family vacation place and I always marvel at the sound and movement and never-ending energy of that awesome place. It's a place where I experience the presence of God. Another verse asks "Have you ever stood in the family with the Lord there in your midst? Seen the face of Christ on each other? Then I say you've seen Jesus my Lord!" When we are together in the family of God, even when we interact with neighbors and members of the wider community, we can see and experience the real presence of God in the face and spirit of those around us. So perhaps we do encounter the real presence of God more readily than we realize at first. Or perhaps putting it another way would be better – we are encountered by a God who chooses to reveal to us the majesty and glory of his incredible being!

Why? Why does this God described by Isaiah with the thrice-repeated "Holy, Holy, Holy" choose to be revealed and present and visible to the creation formed and shaped by God's powerful word? There is really only one answer: **Relationship!** This Holy God is passionate about his creation, especially the crowning part of that creation – human beings. Remember talking last week as we read about Jeremiah's experience of God's calling in his life about our being created by God, called by God, and carried by God? God does all this for the glorious purpose of bringing us into a dynamic, transformational relationship with the Living God so that we can also become active participants in the work of redeeming not only humanity but all that God has created! And that is exactly what happens both to Peter and to Isaiah in our readings today.

Both Peter and Isaiah are given the opportunity to see the majesty and holiness of God: for Peter it is through the miraculous haul of fish taken in after that night of fruitless effort. When Peter **sees** the nets overflowing, he sees in Jesus something transcending anything he has experienced before in his life. When Isaiah sees his vision of the Lord, high and lifted up on his heavenly throne surrounded by the seraphs singing and praising the holy God, he **sees** the reality of God as never before! Each is given the gift of a real encounter with the indescribable!

Each also responds in the same way – they realize and acknowledge their sinfulness in the face of the holy and majestic before them. Whenever we enter the real presence of God, we are confronted with our own inadequacy. Both men shrink in the face of the infinite and recognize they are unworthy to be in the same company with this holy God. Yet, this awesome God, revealed to Peter in the visible incarnation of Jesus Christ, does not drive them away or magnify the guilt they have so easily confessed. In Isaiah's case, one of the seraphs brings a live coal (fire in Scripture always represents purification) and touches his lips cleansing him of his guilt. In Peter's case, we can imagine Jesus reaching out to touch Peter and assure him that all will be alright. We sometimes struggle with this part of our understanding of ourselves in relationship with God. We can overemphasize our guilt and conclude we are truly beyond God's reach, or we can underestimate our fallen nature and conclude we are basically good as human beings. The truth is we are sinners before a holy and righteous God who chooses to love and redeem us anyway!

And so God graciously forgives us and loves us into that transformational relationship with him so that, finally, we may be sent in his name to participate in the redemptive vision God has for the entire creation! God wants all creation to be finally restored to right relationship intended for it from the beginning of time but lost in the fall into sin. And God chooses to not only redeem us but to include us in the wonderful privilege of

sharing that good news – that Gospel – with all those we interact with during our earthly pilgrimage. So Isaiah offers in response to God’s grace – “Here am I, Lord, Send me!” Peter is told he will begin fishing for people as he leaves all to follow Jesus and begin the great adventure that would turn his life upside down! And so you and I are also called into that same relationship and that same response of willing service to others in light of the grace we have received.

Over these early weeks of my ministry with and among you, I have used a benediction several times which I know as the “Halverson Benediction”. Used for years by Richard Halverson, Presbyterian pastor and former Chaplain of the United States Senate, it simply says “You go nowhere by accident. Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God has something he wants to do through you. Christ, who dwells in you, has something he wants to do through you wherever you are. Believe this, and go in his grace and love and power!” Just like Isaiah, just like Peter, each of us who have encountered the real presence of God, seen our own sinfulness and need for forgiveness, and accepted the free gift of God’s love in Jesus Christ, have also been sent to spread the Good News of God’s passionate desire to be in right relationship with all of his creation. We are sent to our homes and neighborhoods and places of employment and education and leisure activity to make visible to others the real presence of God – so they may too see Jesus our Lord!

There is no better place to reflect on this truth today than at the Lord’s Table spread before us. We see the awesomeness of God in creating us, loving us, and sending Jesus to forgive us while we were still sinners. As John Fisher put it, “Have you ever looked at the cross, with a man hangin’ in pain? Seen the look of love in his eyes? Then I say you’ve seen Jesus my Lord.” May that vision truly touch our hearts and minds this day and every day! Amen.